

FIRST PERSON PREACHING

**A Professional Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
the School of Theology at Claremont**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry**

**by
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PREFACE

For some years I have preached occasionally in a first person style. While many members of the congregations which I have served have expressed their appreciation for the individual messages and style, the style has not been evaluated. My recent involvement in a course of study designed to broaden my academic background and to improve certain background skills led me into a course entitled "Preaching in the Context of Worship" taught by K. Morgan Edwards of the Claremont School of Theology. In that course I became exposed to a device developed by Dr. Edwards for evaluating the effectiveness of style and content in preaching. It occurred to me that a similar device might be useful in assessing the effectiveness of first person preaching.

It is the purpose of this project to test the effectiveness of first person preaching in one congregation by tabulating and analyzing the responses of a limited number of parishioners to four first person sermons delivered in the same church. It is expected that in this way the effectiveness of first person preaching relative to a more conventional preaching style will emerge and give guidance as to the frequency with which the first person style should be used.

The guidance and inspiration of K. Morgan Edwards and Ronald E. Osborn in the writing of this project is greatly appreciated.

The writing of these pages is dedicated to Mary Jane, whose encouragement has kept me at the task, and to The Members of Lancaster United Methodist Church, whose expectations of pulpit excellence provide a constant challenge.

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this project is to test the effectiveness of first person preaching relative to conventional preaching as a technique for interesting, informing, and motivating members of a Christian congregation. First person preaching is defined as that style of preaching wherein the speaker assumes the identity of another person and proceeds to communicate his message in an autobiographical manner.

The procedure involved writing and presenting four first person sermons before one congregation. The subjects of those four sermons were Jeremiah, to represent the Old Testament era; the Apostle Paul, to represent the New Testament era; Hugh Latimer, to represent the period of the Reformation; and Martin Luther King, Jr., to represent the contemporary era. In addition to the four first person sermons, two other conventional sermons were prepared and presented before the same congregation.

For purposes of evaluation two sermon reaction questionnaires were developed; one for first person preaching, and one for conventional preaching. The difference between the two questionnaires was that the first person questionnaire contained three additional questions pertaining specifically to first person preaching. Appropriate questionnaires were distributed to fifteen persons

each time a test sermon was presented. Responses to the first person sermons were tallied and commented upon individually and corporately. Responses to the conventional sermons were tallied and commented upon only corporately.

A table listing the percentage of favorable responses to each kind of preaching was prepared. For purposes of comparison, favorable responses were deemed to be those affirmative statements on the questionnaires with which respondents agreed or agreed strongly, and those negative statements on the questionnaires with which persons disagreed or disagreed strongly. For easier reading, those negative statements were then rewritten in a positive manner and the percentage of responses which were favorable were listed for first person preaching and conventional preaching respectively.

At almost every point the conventional sermons received a more favorable response than the first person sermons. First person preaching is weakest in areas dealing with motivation. The results demonstrate that first person preaching may be used effectively for interesting and informing a congregation, but because it is less effective than conventional preaching, it should not be used with regularity, and it should not be used where a high level of motivation is desired.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Christian people going through crises or temptations, experiencing pain or doubt, having difficulties in their homes or in their business lives, may often feel that they are the only ones who have experienced such difficulties. They may despair because they feel no one else has been similarly tried. If such persons could be in small sharing groups where they could be open and honest with other persons, they would discover that their individual situations are not greatly different from those about them. Such an ability to share would undoubtedly provide some help on, and insights into, the handling of problems. Because such openness is threatening, and those who have such problems are not convinced of the values of sharing them with others, they may not choose to become a part of small groups. The person may continue to live with his problem and to assume that there is no one who feels as he/she does.

Such a person may participate in the services of worship in the local church and hope thereby to have some of his/her needs met. While no single worship service can be expected to meet the need of every person in attendance on a particular occasion, in the course of time one element

or another of the service may communicate something which that person needs to hear. In Protestant worship it is the sermon, the spoken word, which is considered central in the worship experience. Unfortunately, the sermon may fail to capture the imagination of the individual in such a way that needed information is communicated and appropriate action is motivated. What is needed is a style of preaching which will capture the interest of the individual, inform him/her about a resource in scripture or Christian tradition which may be helpful to him/her in dealing with his/her own problem, and then motivate him/her to deal with that material in a manner which is appropriate for himself/herself.

The Proposal

If a person could be made aware that there have been others who have had problems similiar to his/her own, and learn that those others have found either the solutions for their problems or the courage to live with them, such a person might feel relieved or strengthened. Sometimes, however, the advice of the Apostle Paul, or the word of some Old Testament prophet is thought to be too remote to be relevant to the life of a twentieth century Christian. For this reason, much that might be of help in the religious tradition of an individual is dismissed. A style of preaching designed to make the heroes of the faith come to life, and to address issues of their day which have contemporary significance might be helpful. One proposal for

interesting, informing, and motivating members of a Christian congregation is for the preacher to assume the identity of the subject of the sermon. This may be called first person preaching. This project is an experiment to evaluate the relative effectiveness of this dramatic, autobiographical mode of preaching.

Work Done by Others

The styles of a number of preachers in the life and history of the church have been examined in an attempt to discover others who have used this method of preaching. Surprisingly, little has been discovered which would indicate that this style of preaching has been used to any degree by others.

Jarvis P. Brown, former pastor of First Methodist Church, San Pedro, California, preached a sermon in 1966 in which he assumed the identity of James, the brother of Jesus.¹ He begins his message by describing the historical setting and indicating to the people that he wants to take them back in time so that James, the brother of Jesus, can speak with them. Then he invites the congregation to listen as James speaks. His sermon was presented on Easter Sunday. He does a very commendable job of taking people through a possible family situation in Jesus' early years,

¹Jarvis P. Brown, "How Brother James Saw It". Sermon preached at First Methodist Church, San Pedro, California, April 10, 1966.

and then on through the crucifixion, resurrection, and eventual developing faith of James himself. As an outline he simply uses some of the chronological events of the life of Jesus. No lessons or morals are drawn from the story. The sermon is simply an effective telling of the story, which might be considered inspirational and informational, but without a challenge to the current-day listener.

Harold F. Leestma, former associate pastor of Garden Grove Community Church, in Garden Grove, California, preached what he called a dramatic monologue in the first person as he took on the identity of Pontius Pilate.² In that sermon he begins immediately with the announcement that he is Pontius Pilate. Then Pilate, filled with self-recrimination, narrates the events as they unfolded in the trial of Jesus. He suggests that he, Pilate, knew all along that he was doing the wrong thing in condemning Jesus. In this sermon Pilate has come back from the grave. His intention is to help people to realize that they, too, must make decisions with regard to Christ. He urges them not to do as he did, but to make the right decision. The sermon has no visible outline, and the only application Pilate makes of his situation to that of others is the importance of making the right decision with regard to Christ. He leaves the congregation with the question, "What will you do?"

²Harold F. Leestma, "Life's Most Important Decision". Sermon preached at Garden Grove Community Church, Garden Grove, California. No date.

Ben F. Lehmberg, at the time pastor of First Methodist Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado, wrote a monologue which was published in 1964, in which he assumes the identity of a guest at the inn on the night that Jesus was born.³ In addition to a narration of the events of the evening, the speaker engages in considerable introspection, thinking about some of his own problems, which are solved by the coming of Jesus. He makes no personal application of his experience to the life of his audience, except that, in his concluding sentence, he wonders aloud whether the things which he has seen are only experienced by believers. The message is well done, and makes a very familiar event interesting by casting it in a new light.

R. Blaine Detrick, a United Methodist Pastor, from Parkersburg, West Virginia, published two books of dramatic monologues in 1976.⁴ His monologues, which were presented as sermons, are all based on Biblical characters. Some of these, such as Zacchaeus, Nicodemus, Judas and Pilate are mentioned by name in scripture. Others, while Biblical, have only been alluded to in scripture and without even the mention of a name. Therefore, these stories are almost entirely the creation of the author. Detrick indicates

³Ben F. Lehmberg, "This is the Way Christ Comes," P.E.O. Record (December 1964), 6 ff.

⁴R. Blaine Detrick, I Met Jesus When He Suffered (Lima, OH: C.S.S., 1976); see also R. Blaine Detrick, I Met Jesus When He Ministered (Lima, OH: C.S.S., 1976).

that he tries to be the person whose personality he is assuming.⁵ It is his assessment that this method would not be significant if used week after week. "But", he says, "used at special times, on selected occasions, the monologue can increase attendance and interest at church gatherings."⁶ Though his book does not provide examples, he indicates that,

One need not be limited, either, to the Bible; multitudes of historical, legendary, or literary characters are also available; the possibilities for creativity are almost unlimited. A bit of research and study, along with an imagination that is permitted free rein, will soon provide material for you to move as far as you desire in the planning of as many monologues as you wish.⁷

In preparing the Biblical monologues he states that he tries to use "sanctified imagination."

This means I'm not hesitant about adding incidents or experiences that will clarify or amplify the story. Never do I distort the scriptures; these monologues are based strictly on biblical record. I remain faithful to the written account, but do not limit myself to it. What I add could have happened--or maybe it did!⁸

Development of First Person Preaching

My experiences are similar to those of Detrick. It should be evident that if one is attempting to build a sermon based on the experience of an individual who is mentioned only briefly in the Bible, imagination must play a large part. It has been my experience that first person

⁵Detrick, I Met Jesus When He Suffered, p. 5.

⁶Ibid., p. 6. ⁷Ibid., p. 9. ⁸Ibid.

preaching has been well received by the congregation. I have carried on this enterprise in several congregations, and because of the enthusiasm expressed by my hearers, the proportion of first person sermons to more traditional sermons is increasing. I have prepared and delivered over fifty such sermons. Generally they are based on Biblical characters or Biblical events. Increasingly, however, I have come to see that this style of preaching has great value in acquainting a congregation with other persons in the Christian tradition with whom they might not otherwise come into contact.

I became involved with this style of preaching one Christmas Eve when I delivered a dramatic reading entitled "The Other Wise Man" by Henry Van Dyke. It was not a monologue, but I discovered that by changing voices and styles of speaking I could accomodate all the parts. The congregation was so enthusiastic about this that I began to look around for other material which could be presented in the form of a monologue. Discovering that there was not a great deal of material available, which was appropriate for use in a Christian worship service, I began to experiment by telling some of the more familiar stories of the Bible from the point of view of a participant in the event. For example, I told about the Slaughter of the Innocents from the point of view of King Herod. Such presentations involved the study, not only of scripture, but of Biblical history, secular history, and in some instances, theology.

Initially, I felt that this kind of preaching was most appropriate during those times of the Christian year which lend themselves to a certain degree of pageantry and drama-- notably Lent, Easter, Advent and Christmas. I soon discovered, however, that what I had hit upon was more than entertainment. Members of the congregation were "hearing" things for the first time in stories and incidents with which they had been familiar since childhood. It occurred to me, then, that first person preaching could be more than simply a novelty--it could be used to bring home a point, or several points, in the same way that traditional preaching intends to do, but with greater drama.

Often, a first person sermon develops as I deal with a particular text and then become interested in the context. I begin to see that the situation out of which the Biblical author was writing has certain parallels with our own situation, and that if the author himself were called upon to tell of his experience, individuals in the congregation could make the connection for themselves.

My method of preparation now is to study the passage I wish to present, study commentaries and the approaches of other preachers to the passage, read articles on the character or situation in a good Bible dictionary, read one or more books on the character, if a definite character develops. I then study pertinent books in the field of Theology and Biblical Introduction to ascertain what critical scholarship is saying about the time, author and

situation. If one is going to say something vivid, which his/her hearers will remember, he/she may need to use some "sanctified imagination", but he/she certainly has the responsibility to avoid knowingly presenting misinformation. For example, I wanted to present a sermon on Solomon which would be based on the Book of Ecclesiastes. The book of Ecclesiastes seems to make the claim for itself that it was written by King Solomon.⁹ Biblical scholarship disagrees.¹⁰ Therefore, one needs to be cautious about how much of the book of Ecclesiastes comes from Solomon. I got around this by having Solomon point out that it was a person called Koheleth, or "the preacher", who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes but that Koheleth based much of what he said on certain experiences of Solomon, so that Solomon was thereby able to deal seriously with Koheleth's description of some of the events of Solomon's life.¹¹

As the materials begin to accumulate I generally discover that there are several experiences or ideas which developed in the life of the character which are applicable to life today. These then become the key ideas the

⁹Ecclesiastes 1:1.

¹⁰George Fohrer, Introduction To The Old Testament (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 336.

¹¹David Rogne, "Solomon on Affluence". Sermon preached at Thousand Oaks United Methodist Church, Thousand Oaks, California, January 28, 1968.

character is trying to get across to those who are hearing him. The remaining incidents in the life of the individual become the connecting links, which attempt to show how the character progressed in his thinking or developed one idea after another. Sometimes it seems appropriate to have the character point out how his experience relates to people living today. At other times it seems sufficient to have the character simply say how he dealt with his particular situation, leaving the application to the individuals who hear it. This means that one has to decide before the final writing whether he/she conceives of his/her character as speaking only in his/her own time, or whether he/she considers the character to have died and to have come back to the present congregation with certain insights which he/she has gained because, in the interval, he/she has continued to be aware of the developments in history. One must further decide whether the character has subsequently changed his/her point of view and whether he/she can now comment upon maturer reflection, or whether the character still has the same point of view which is historically attributed to him/her. For example, Herod is far more interesting as an individual if he continues to be violent, erratic and devious as he tells his story, rather than to be a person who has come to see the error of his ways.¹² The hearers then have to examine their own hearts

¹²David Rogne, "Herod". Sermon preached at Thousand Oaks United Methodist Church, Thousand Oaks, California, December 11, 1966.

to see if there are ways in which their attitudes are similar to those of Herod. Judas, on the other hand is more useful homiletically as a person who recognizes what he has done and who is sorry about the consequences of his act.¹³

Similar considerations must be made with regard to non-biblical characters. In preparing a first person sermon on Albert Schweitzer, for example, I was attempting to help the congregation to understand the importance of reverence for life.¹⁴ Rather than simply tell the story of Albert Schweitzer from his birth to a certain point in his life, I felt that it would be more appropriate to describe how the idea of reverence for life crystalized in his own mind, and then move backward in time using some of his personal experiences to illustrate how he was being prepared to develop this idea. It is frequently of value, therefore, to pick up the life of an individual at some high point, or toward the end of his/her life, when his/her ideas have been more fully developed, and then to move backward in time in an attempt to reveal how the character developed to that point.

¹³David Rogne, "Judas Iscariot". Sermon preached at Thousand Oaks United Methodist Church, Thousand Oaks, California, March 5, 1967.

¹⁴David Rogne, "Albert Schweitzer". Sermon preached at Lancaster United Methodist Church, Lancaster, California, June 1, 1975.

Method and Procedures

In the course of this project four sermons were written to test the value of first person preaching as a device for speaking from four different periods of the Hebrew-Christian tradition. They are included in historical sequence. Jeremiah represents the Old Testament era, the Apostle Paul the New Testament era, Hugh Latimer the period of Reformation, and Martin Luther King, Jr., the contemporary era. Each of the following four chapters contains material introductory to the sermon, the sermon itself, and an evaluation of that particular sermon.

In addition to the preaching of the four first person sermons, two other, more conventional sermons were preached before the same congregation, and evaluated by a similar number of persons. The sermons so presented are included in the Appendix, but the evaluative material is in the text.

Method of Evaluation

In an effort to determine the effectiveness of first person preaching relative to conventional preaching, two sermon reaction questionnaires were developed. One was used to evaluate first person preaching; the other was used to evaluate conventional preaching. Approximately fifteen of the appropriate questionnaires were distributed in a random fashion to worshippers who were present when a particular sermon was being preached. Those filling out the

questionnaires were not asked to identify themselves, and no attempt was made to discover who filled out the questionnaires. Those who were invited to participate filled out the questionnaire immediately following the sermon and either handed in the form or dropped it by the church office. Respondents were asked to indicate their reactions to both the content and method of delivery by circling one of five options for each statement. They had the opportunity to agree strongly, to agree, to be uncertain, to disagree, or to disagree strongly. In order to keep the evaluators alert some statements were written in the affirmative and some were written in the negative. For each of the first person sermons which follow, significant responses will be noted. In a sixth chapter a compilation of responses to the two conventional sermons will be commented upon. In the concluding chapter trends in the questionnaires on the first person sermons will be noted and compared with trends in the questionnaires related to the conventional sermons. A copy of each of the questionnaires, entitled Table 1 and Table 2, respectively, follows.

TABLE 1

Sermon Reaction Questionnaire
(First Person Preaching)

Sermon Title _____

This questionnaire has been designed to help assess the relative effectiveness of first person preaching. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following reactions to the sermon you have just heard. These reactions apply to both content and method of delivery of the sermon. Indicate your reactions on the scale as follows: Circle 1 for strongly agree, 2 for agree, 3 for uncertain, 4 for disagree, 5 for strongly disagree. Your honesty and frankness will be appreciated. Note that some questions are affirmative and some are negative.

1. 1 2 3 4 5 maintained my interest
2. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me see a contemporary issue
 more clearly
3. 1 2 3 4 5 did not inspire me
4. 1 2 3 4 5 really seemed to bring the character to
 life
5. 1 2 3 4 5 seemed too artificial--too much like
 "play acting"
6. 1 2 3 4 5 used words and thought patterns in
 present day usage
7. 1 2 3 4 5 lacked the directness of a conventional
 sermon
8. 1 2 3 4 5 led me toward personal action or change
9. 1 2 3 4 5 was not very well understood by me

10. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me to hear a word of judgment
I needed to hear
11. 1 2 3 4 5 projected an attitude of love for mankind
12. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me to understand God's love for me
13. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me to understand God's love for
all others
14. 1 2 3 4 5 spoke to some of my personal needs
15. 1 2 3 4 5 made me feel a oneness with the character
16. 1 2 3 4 5 did not have a sufficiently forceful
conclusion
17. 1 2 3 4 5 did not initiate an encounter between
God and myself
18. 1 2 3 4 5 contained points that were easy to
remember
19. 1 2 3 4 5 made me eager to serve God more than I
have served him up until now
20. 1 2 3 4 5 led me to accept the message

TABLE 2

Sermon Reaction Questionnaire
(Conventional Sermon)

Sermon Title _____

This questionnaire has been designed to help assess the relative effectiveness of this style of preaching. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following reactions to the sermon you have just heard. These reactions apply to both content and method of delivery of the sermon. Indicate your reactions on the scale as follows: Circle 1 for strongly agree, 2 for agree, 3 for uncertain, 4 for disagree, 5 for strongly disagree. Your honesty and frankness will be appreciated. Note that some questions are affirmative and some are negative. Please hand this item to the Pastor or place it in the mail slot of the church office door today. Thank you.

1. 1 2 3 4 5 maintained my interest
2. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me see a contemporary issue
 more clearly
3. 1 2 3 4 5 did not inspire me
4. 1 2 3 4 5 seemed artificial
5. 1 2 3 4 5 used words and thought patterns in
 present day usage
6. 1 2 3 4 5 led me toward personal action or change
7. 1 2 3 4 5 was not very well understood by me
8. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me to hear a word of judgment
 I needed to hear
9. 1 2 3 4 5 projected an attitude of love for mankind

10. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me to understand God's love
for me
11. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me to understand God's love
for all others
12. 1 2 3 4 5 spoke to some of my personal needs
13. 1 2 3 4 5 did not have a sufficiently forceful
conclusion
14. 1 2 3 4 5 did not initiate an encounter between
God and myself
15. 1 2 3 4 5 contained points that were easy to
remember
16. 1 2 3 4 5 made me eager to serve God more than
I have served him up until now
17. 1 2 3 4 5 led me to accept the message

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Chapter 2

JEREMIAH

Introduction

The person chosen as the subject of a sermon to demonstrate the application of the first person preaching technique to the Old Testament period is the prophet Jeremiah. The Book of Jeremiah is one of the longer books in the Old Testament and provides us with substantial material with which to work. Not only are there generous amounts of material from Jeremiah's preaching ministry, there is also considerable biographical information, which helps to make his story more interesting. A great deal of other Biblical material is also available which helps us to understand the era in which the prophet lived. His ministry spanned more than forty years, so there are also many interesting historical events which may be included as his story unfolds.

Problems arise, however, when one attempts to apply Jeremiah's experiences to the world of the twentieth century. Jeremiah was speaking specifically about the people of Judah, who believed that they had a unique relationship with the Lord. He advocated appeasement of the enemy, a message difficult for the people of his own day to accept, and even more difficult for a strong nation in

the twentieth century to understand. Obviously, his perception of the needs of his nation in his time cannot be applied uncritically to a different nation at a different time. Nevertheless, if one believes, as I do, that God still speaks to people today through his Word, then it is legitimate to seek for a word from the Lord even in a book written for a particular people at a particular time.

The reason for choosing this person. One of the reasons for choosing Jeremiah is the pathos of much of his work. His words have the capacity for touching the minor chords in the lives of many persons. He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" who persevered in his ordeals and continued to trust in the Lord without being Pollyanna. Because of what he suffered he was periodically angry with God. He knew that "Dark Night of the Soul" which is familiar to many persons who feel out of contact with God. I felt, therefore, that he would be a particularly appropriate person to speak to others who find themselves angry with God.

In addition, Jeremiah's life provides an excellent opportunity to convey some history of the events which were taking place in the closing days of the Kingdom of Judah. It was my intention to help the congregation understand some of the circumstances under which portions of the Old Testament were written.

There are a number of important themes in Jeremiah which may be brought to the attention of a twentieth

century congregation. For example, there is Jeremiah's repeated emphasis upon the necessity of social justice as a way of pleasing God. There is also a very strong theme of grace intertwined with Jeremiah's frequent theme of judgment. Almost up until the time when Jerusalem is finally destroyed, Jeremiah is offering the possibility of an altered prospect for Jerusalem and Judah if there would be repentance, acknowledgement of sinful ways, and a return to the Lord. Even when the city and nation are destroyed, Jeremiah still holds out the prospect of hope for the future. These could be important words for any persons who have lost hope for the future.

The reason for including certain events. As I approached this sermon I had no preconceived ideas of what its message would be. I knew that a certain amount of historical information would need to be included in order to give a narrative quality which would maintain interest and, at the very least, provide each person with some increased Biblical knowledge. I concluded, then, that it would be necessary to deal with the events of Jeremiah's life chronologically, insofar as they could be determined and have relevance. I felt that, where possible, I should include references to Jeremiah's visions and symbolic actions, for they were likely to grip the minds of the members of the congregation far more significantly than philosophical concepts, just as Jeremiah himself had discovered in his own time.

It became obvious, however, that I could not simply repeat the burden of Jeremiah's message to his people. I needed to find some broader philosophical principles which would be applicable to the members of my congregation. A significant theme of Jeremiah's is that institutional ritual is not of itself pleasing to God. I felt that this was a point with which members of a contemporary congregation need to deal, for there is often an uninformed reliance on outward rites such as baptism, without consideration of the faith and lifestyle which baptism is intended to represent. There is also prevalent among Christians today a kind of "churchianity", to some degree promoted by the clergy, which tends to equate church attendance with Christian commitment. I felt that Jeremiah's handling of circumcision, a mystical dependence upon the temple, and lack of awareness about an appropriate lifestyle in his day would throw light on the trend toward "churchianity" today.

Another major disclosure of Jeremiah is that, contrary to the expectations of his people, the Lord's reliability was not related to the survival of the nation of Judah. I think that there has long been an assumption on the part of American people that God is uniquely on our side. We have certainly interpreted victory in battle as a blessing bestowed by God because of our national righteousness. Through Jeremiah's experience there was the opportunity to deal with this dangerous assumption and

to lay groundwork for a faith in God which is independent of the survival of any particular nation. Jeremiah's words about future hope would be even more significant to a nation which had lost in battle. Perhaps one day we will need that message.

There is, finally, the insight of Jeremiah that the relationship to God is a personal one. His comments about a new heart and a new covenant are a particularly fruitful prelude to the Christian era. I felt that this insight would be a fitting third point.

The reason for excluding certain events. In dealing with a ministry which extended for more than forty years, it becomes necessary to exclude some items which would make the telling of the story unwieldy or difficult to follow. For example, the Book of Jeremiah contains numerous oracles concerning the surrounding nations. Dealing with those oracles is not essential to the points being made. Moreover, Jeremiah speaks against the importation of certain religious customs from Assyria. To discuss these would necessitate further examination of Judah's dealings with Assyria. I concluded that that was not necessary in this sermon. The reform of Josiah also occurred during Jeremiah's ministry, but apparently had no long-lasting effect on the conduct of the people of Judah. Therefore, considering the time limitations of a sermon, I chose to omit references to that reform.

There also needed to be a point of termination of the message which would be dramatically appealing. Jeremiah's own story trails off into oblivion in Egypt, but the climax of his story takes place with the destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, I felt that it was sufficient to suggest that he lived through the destruction of the city and then to have him refer to his significant discovery of religion of the heart. This meant that other events following the destruction of Jerusalem would not be included.

The effect of critical scholarship. Fohrer¹ and Leslie² make it clear that Jeremiah's ministry lasted some forty years. He is assumed to have been born around 650 B.C.³ with his call experienced approximately 626 B.C.⁴ Leslie suggests that he was nineteen when he received the call.⁵ Fohrer's dates suggest that he was about twenty-four.⁶ I opted for the younger age, as that would heighten the intensity of the appeal that he was too young to serve. He disappears from history in Egypt sometime after 586 B.C.⁷ It is suggested by Fohrer that at the beginning of his ministry Jeremiah did not know what nation would be the

¹George Fohrer, Introduction to the Old Testament (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 389.

²Elmer A. Leslie, Jeremiah (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954) p. 18.

³Fohrer, p. 389. ⁴Leslie, p. 21. ⁵Ibid., p. 21.

⁶Fohrer, p. 389. ⁷Ibid., p. 392.

"foe from the north".⁸ Apparently, this became clear only after the Battle of Carchemish, in 605 B.C.⁹ For this reason, I have Jeremiah name the foe only after the Babylonian victory. All scholarly works consulted are in agreement that the Book of Jeremiah is not the work of a single mind. It has gone through a long and complicated process of compilation.¹⁰ In fact, it is a compilation of compilations.¹¹ These seems to be general agreement that Chapters 1 through 25 contain the most authentic material of Jeremiah.¹² The biographical narratives about Jeremiah, found in Chapters 26 through 45, are thought to be mostly from Baruch.¹³ There are thought to be essentially historically accurate, but it is also assumed that Baruch's writings have reproduced Jeremiah's words in Baruch's language.¹⁴ Leslie gives a long list of passages which he concludes to have been written and inserted into, or added onto, the text of Jeremiah between the years of 587 B.C. and 200 B.C.¹⁵ On the basis of these opinions, I generally attempted to avoid basing major portions of the sermon on passages thought to come from a later time. However, it is also suggested by Leslie that at the heart

⁸Ibid., p. 391. ⁹Leslie, p. 177.

¹⁰J. Muilenburg, "Jeremiah, The Prophet," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962), II, 831.

¹¹Ibid., p. 831. ¹²Ibid., p. 832. ¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 834. ¹⁵Leslie, pp. 280-331.

of many of these passages are authentic words of Jeremiah which we would not otherwise know.¹⁶ Consequently, I felt that it was appropriate to have Jeremiah refer to an idea which is integral to the book, whether Jeremiah framed it in its present form or not. It is the passage describing the New Covenant, which is found in chapters 30 and 31. Muilenburg suggests that this passage is not from Jeremiah, though it is conceded that the thought is from Jeremiah.¹⁷ Therefore, I felt it appropriate to build the concluding part of the sermon on that passage.

In preparing this sermon and others based on Biblical characters I have found that, while it is desirable to be informed by Biblical scholarship, in the final analysis one needs to exercise the freedom to base his/her characterization on the Biblical record. The following words of Walter Russell Bowie express my sentiment:

Whether or not objective history can validate the details of some of the lives of which the Bible tells is of secondary importance. The important matter is that these great figures are immortal representatives of the meaning of man. They focus the conceptions of many ages as to what life is in its struggle with good and evil, of courage with cowardice, and the glory of God entering in through human experience to transform the things of the earth.¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid., p. 283.

¹⁷Muilenburg, p. 834.

¹⁸Walter Russell Bowie, Great Men of the Bible
(New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), preface.

The resolution of certain difficulties. In attempting to catch the interest of the congregation I felt that it would be more appropriate to begin with the call of Jeremiah than with his birth. Consequently, I began with the words of his call and then challenged the congregation to consider whether they thought such a call would be easy to live with. Before I began writing the sermon, I concluded that Jeremiah would be speaking from a timeless environment, but to an unidentified contemporary audience. I determined that he would not necessarily base any remarks on knowledge of the twentieth century, but that, in order to make application of the things he had learned, he would be able to refer to the possibility that his audience had had similar experiences. I also decided that, since the destruction of Jerusalem formed a climax in Jeremiah's story, I would not have him refer to events which followed that catastrophe. Therefore, Jeremiah would not have to make any reference to his death.

Since subsequent editors of the Book of Jeremiah have rearranged some of the materials available to them, and sometimes placed materials out of chronological order, it becomes difficult, in some instances, to say with accuracy when a particular statement was made or an incident took place.¹⁹ I have generally followed Leslie's suggestions as to where particular materials belonged.

¹⁹Muilenburg, p. 831.

Because so much of what Jeremiah says sounds like severe judgment, I have attempted also to insert periodic references to the possibility of repentance and reconciliation with God. It was my intention by so doing to relieve the sense of judgment and hold out the possibility of grace. I determined that a very graphic illustration with which to close would be the insight which Jeremiah gained from the visit to the potter's house. This was illustrative for him of God's dealings with Judah, but it occurred to me that it also held out hope for any people willing to recognize the relatedness of humanity. Leslie concludes that this incident took place in the late reign of Jehoiakim (602-598).²⁰ Though I have placed it at the end of the sermon for dramatic effect, I do not indicate the time when this incident may have occurred.

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²⁰Leslie, p. 191.

Muilenburg, J. "Jeremiah, The Prophet," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, (1962), II, 823-835.

Extensive reconstruction of the life, ministry, and writings of Jeremiah divided into five periods.

Jeremiah

I can still remember the words which started me out on my unwilling journey: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." It was God who was speaking to me. Oh, how I wished that the words were not addressed to me. I tried to avoid the call. I said, "I am only a youth." After all, I was only about nineteen. But God said, "I will be with you and deliver you." I then responded that I didn't know how to speak, but God touched my mouth and said, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth."

Perhaps you think that it would be exciting to be a prophet. Well, after forty years as a spokesman for God, I can tell you that it has not been an easy experience--pain, agony, sorrow, sadness, abuse, punishment, rejection, isolation--these things have all been a part of it. But there has been nothing in the role that one would seek if he had the choice. Many times I would have given up this task--but I could not--I was compelled to speak.

Soon after the call came to me it was confirmed by two visions. First I saw an almond branch budding, and I heard God saying, "I am watching over my word to perform it." I took that to mean that God was sovereign in His world and that He would bring to pass whatever He said, even as He brought blossoms out of the almond branch. Then I saw a boiling pot with steam being blown from the north,

and I heard God saying, "Out of the north evil shall break forth on the inhabitants of the land." This meant to me that a military power from the north was going to fall upon my people, Judah, and that I was commissioned to provide the warning. I was told that I would meet with opposition from kings, princes, priests and people, but that I must speak what God commanded, and He would be with me.

My name is Jeremiah. I am from the little village of Anathoth, about two miles north of Jerusalem. My father, Hilkiah, was a priest in Anathoth, so most of my life had been spent in a devout home in a small village. I was told to go to Jerusalem to proclaim my message, which I understood was to bring the people back to God.

I thought it best to discover for myself how the people were living, so that I could speak from knowledge. What I discovered appalled me! I walked through the streets of Jerusalem and discovered that the people were lying, faithless and unjust to one another. I thought that perhaps it was only the ignorant and poor who did not know God's law, but I found that it was the same among the prominent. They were treacherous with one another, they had no compassion, they showed no social justice. I searched highways and byways, shops and bazaars, but found not one person who lived responsibly. I understood that punishment would be inevitable if the people did not change their ways. I felt that I had become an assayer, testing my people's character, but all of them proved to be dross.

The outcome for my people was to be a sad one, but perhaps what I learned during my ministry could have some value for you, for people in every age need to evaluate themselves.

One thing I learned is that true religion is not dependent upon institutional ritual. My people thought of themselves as a people who were special because they had received the law. But it was obvious from their lifestyle that they did not know God's law. I had noticed migratory birds moving in precision across the sky, responding to a deep-seated law within their being. The most characteristic element of Israel should have been that the Lord was her God, and the one thing above all others that should mark a true child of the covenant is obedience to the will of God. So I spoke to my people:

Even the stork in the heavens
Knows its prescribed times;
And the turtledoves, swifts, and swallows
Keep the time of their migration,
But my people do not know
The ordinance of the Lord.

The people had heard the law, but it could not save them, for they did not practice it. Perhaps you, too, know how you should live, but that is no help, if you don't practice it.

Others were relying unduly on religious rituals. They thought that by the abundance of their sacrifices and the intricacy of their religious observances they could please God. I told them that God was not impressed by sacrifices, but by obedience. God is an ethical being; he is not the one who had set up the elaborate sacrificial

system. Men had done that, and as a result they had diverted attention from what was absolutely essential to the worship of God--moral obedience.

A further example: My people practiced circumcision. It was a mark on our bodies that we were the people of God--and many felt that it insured God's protection. I told them that the outward mark of circumcision was utterly worthless. It had been intended to signify spiritual dependence and amended lives--but it had come to signify nothing. What was needed was a circumcised heart! A ritual wasn't going to save anyone if it didn't reflect an inner attitude. Perhaps there are rituals that you have been relying on that need to be reexamined to discover their original meaning.

The place I really got into trouble was when I spoke against the temple. You see, religious people tend to think that the place where they worship is the dwelling place of God. My people had been worshipping in the temple for three hundred fifty years; it had become hallowed by tradition. I stood up in the court of the temple and told them that the temple wasn't going to save anyone. God could not abide with his people, no matter how ardent their love for the temple, if they oppressed the helpless in society and continued to steal, murder, commit adultery, and lie. What God desired was morally transformed conduct.

They believed that the temple was some kind of talisman, and that its presence would protect them from

all harm. I told them that if they did not change their ways, God himself would destroy that holy place and send them off to exile. That was going too far! The prophets and the priests seized me and accused me of blasphemy. They said that I should die. I insisted that I was speaking only as the Lord had instructed me, and that my purpose was to bring the people to repentance. They let me go, but I was a marked man; informers eagerly reported what I said, assassinations were attempted, even my own family threatened me, for I was an embarrassment to them. I was hurt, confused, frightened, but nevertheless determined to make my people see what would surely happen if they did not change. I took a pottery jar and broke it before a small crowd at the gate of the city, and I said, "In just such a manner will the Lord break the people of this city into pieces, because they refuse to hear the word of the Lord." When I spoke again in the temple area, Pashhur, one of the temple officers, had me arrested, beaten, and placed in stocks for twenty-four hours because, he said, I was falsely exercising a prophet's function. People who do not like what God is saying to them will do all in their power to shut up God's word, even as I was shut up in stocks. When I was released, I was forbidden to enter the temple area.

I cursed the day that I was born, that I should find myself in this predicament. I hadn't asked for this job--it was thrust upon me. I didn't want to be the

bearer of evil tidings; I didn't enjoy bringing bad news. Nevertheless, I was suffering because of it. I decided to keep silent--but the words became a burning fire in my bones--I had to speak.

About that time I was led to take another approach. I received a revelation that I should write down the contents of my preaching ministry up to that point. I hoped that the cumulative effect of my words might succeed, where my messages individually had failed. I hoped that my people might return to God and be forgiven. So I dictated my sermons to my friend, Baruch, and then asked him to go and read the words of the scroll publicly in the temple, for I was forbidden to enter it. Some nobles got hold of the scroll and had it read before the king. In an effort to demonstrate his utter contempt for the word of the Lord, the king cut off every few columns of the scroll as it was read, and threw the pieces into the fire. There was now no hope for Judah. I could and did write a new scroll, but I could not make the people or the king repent.

A second thing that I learned is that true religion is not dependent upon national survival. My people felt that our nation was special--that it would always survive. They could quote the promises of some of the past prophets who had spoken of such survival. The problem was that they didn't take seriously the conditions of those promises--that they must live just and upright lives, serving the Lord. There was no reason to think we were God's pet any

longer. More than one hundred years before, the Assyrians had swooped down on our sister kingdom, Israel, and taken her people into exile. When that was pointed out to the people of Judah they said, in effect, "Ah, yes, but those people really were unrighteous, and God was punishing them." Somehow, my people couldn't get the message that this could happen to them, too.

In 605 B.C., some twenty years after my call, we lost a major battle with Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon, and we became tributary to him. It became clear to me that Babylon was the foe from the north, which I had seen in my first vision. I urged the king and people not to provoke Nebuchadrezzar, so that things would go well with us, for I saw him as the unwitting instrument of God, sent to correct us and to cause us to examine our lives. My preaching was to no avail. At the urging of Egypt, our king stopped paying tribute, and in 597 Nebuchadrezzar defeated our forces, captured our city, and took the king and ten thousand of our leading citizens into exile in Babylon. A new king was put on the throne, but our cities were left in-tact.

In no time the people were again discussing rebellion. They were so hopeful that the exiles would return, that they listened to anyone who said it would be soon--and the prophets and priests told them what they wanted to hear. I could see that the exile would be long and that my people had better forget this talk of rebellion,

or the Bablonians would come and utterly destroy our land and take more people into captivity.

They would not listen. In time the foreign ministers of some of the small powers around us gathered in Jerusalem for a secret conference to discuss revolt. I felt led to become a demonstrator. I put a wooden yoke on my neck and paraded all through the city, saying that we had better recognize the situation that we were in--that the Lord of creation had allowed this to come to pass and that we had better learn to live peaceably under this yoke. Of course, that was not a popular message, but the people needed to hear it. Hananiah, one of the prophets who wanted war, took the yoke from my neck and broke it in pieces saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'Like this will I break the yoke of the king of Babylon within two years from the neck of all the nations.'" I said that nothing would please me more--but it was not to be, for Hananiah's words did not take into account Judah's moral condition. Time would bear out who was right.

I continued to try to bring the people back to God. I chose a symbolic action to make my point. The word of the Lord came to me telling me not to marry. My celibate life was to be a constant reminder to all who saw me that I was disengaging myself from the destiny of Judah, for what they faced was only sadness and destruction, and I did not want to have wife and children who would go through that. I hoped it would be a warning.

Eventually, the worst happened. The king was persuaded to revolt. Judah was attacked, her towns destroyed, and Jerusalem surrounded by Babylonian troops. By now the king had come to believe that I spoke the word of the Lord, but he was not able to stand against the contrary opinion of the nobles, who were against me, and who sought to destroy me. I told him and all who would listen that we should surrender, or Jerusalem would be destroyed. Now they became concerned for social justice and gave order that all slaves should be freed. They thought this might please God. In reality, those who owned slaves could no longer afford to feed them in a besieged city--so the reason for release was economic. About that time Egypt made a weak gesture of coming to our aid and the siege was lifted. The people thought they were delivered, and the first thing they did was to put their slaves back into bondage--such was their faithlessness and irresponsibility.

I sought to go to my home village on a business matter, but I was arrested, accused of going over to the enemy, and thrown into prison as a traitor. The Babylonians returned and we were once again laid under siege--this time I knew that the end had come for our beloved city. Still I wanted to show my people that there could be hope for the future. An incident which occurred about that time helped me to make the point. A cousin, who owned property in Anathoth, was in need of money, and sought to sell me the

property, even though it was occupied by foreign troops. I accepted the opportunity, had the deed publicly notarized, and publicly filed, for it was my way of saying that one day houses and fields and vineyards would again be sold in the land. I, who had spoken so much of doom, needed to demonstrate some hope in God.

Eventually, the city was taken, everything in it was destroyed, thousands more were taken into exile, and Judah and Jerusalem were no more. I was allowed to remain in the land with some few others who were to till the soil and care for crops. Fortunately, that is not the last thing I have to say. In this calamity I discovered that true religion is not based on institutional ritual or on national survival.

The third thing that I discovered is that true religion is an affair of the heart. God showed me that one day he would set up a new covenant with his people. Not like the old covenant, written on tables of stone, which the people received at Sinai. That covenant always had about it requirement and obligation--it was something from outside the person. But the new covenant would be written on the heart of the individual. God would put his law in the innermost being of a person, so that to know the law would be to do it. When that day comes no one will have to instruct anyone else saying, "Know the Lord," for everyone will know the Lord, from the most insignificant to the most important. A time was coming when people would recognize

that the Lord is not the God of the Jews only, but the God of all creation. They would see that the Lord is not tied to one land or one temple, for He may be worshiped by anyone, anywhere, when He is worshiped from the heart.

I know that true religion is an affair of the heart, because God granted me a foretaste of that kind of religion in my own life. He called me personally and I responded. That doesn't mean we were always in agreement, however. You may recall, I didn't want the job in the first place. What God had for me to do put me constantly at odds with my people. I was reviled and abused, when all I really wanted was a warm relationship with my fellows. There were times when I even felt cut off from God in my loneliness--I railed against Him that He had not kept His part of the bargain, that I had been let down. But such was our relationship that God did not abandon me. We were friends, and I was permitted to express myself, for it was a relationship of love.

It was that personal relationship which sustained me when all the familiar landmarks of nation and religion were disappearing. I believe that such a relationship can also sustain you, whatever you are called upon to endure. You may be strengthened in trouble, but do not expect such a relationship to protect you from trouble--I certainly did not find that--and do not expect always to understand what God is seeking to do, for in the final analysis He is sovereign, and we are His subjects. That was brought home

forcefully to me by an experience I had. I happened to go into a pottery shop one day, and I observed the potter making a vessel from a lump of clay. He had almost completed the vessel, when some imperfection was found in it. Undismayed, he mashed the marred vessel into a lump again, set the wheels turning, and worked it into another vessel which met with his approval. At that moment a new insight dawned upon my mind. It was the realization that Judah, although it was a spoiled vessel, was still in the hands of God, a God of infinite resourcefulness, and of abiding, enduring love. The purpose of God with his people had been frustrated--but not defeated. The divine potter still loved his clay. Whether for Judah, or for any of us, God has a grand design, which may be temporarily thwarted by our imperfections, but one day we shall be a part of what He is bringing to pass.

Evaluation of the Sermon

Results of the Questionnaire. A compilation of the responses of fourteen persons to the Jeremiah sermon follows on the following page. Most respondents indicated that the sermon maintained their interest. However, in response to the statement "helped me to see a contemporary issue more clearly," two persons were uncertain and one disagreed. It is possible that the extensive historical material used to describe Jeremiah's situation clouded the contemporary application for the three persons who did not agree. It should be born in mind that 76% of the respondents did answer in the affirmative.

To the statement "did not inspire me," ten persons indicated disagreement, but four were uncertain. The latter four responses could indicate that there was too much historical material, or that the pessimistic attitude of Jeremiah was not sufficiently uplifting to be labeled "inspirational."

Almost all respondents felt that the sermon brought the character to life and most disagreed with the statement "seems too artificial--too much like 'play-acting'." Most agreed that the sermon used words and thought patterns in present day usage.

While eleven persons disagreed with the statement "lacked the directness of a conventional sermon," there were two persons who were uncertain and one who agreed. The latter three may have felt that Jeremiah's situation was just too different from our own.

TABLE 3

A COMPILATION OF RESPONSES TO THE
SERMON REACTION QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR JEREMIAH

The following is a compilation of the reactions of fourteen persons to the sermon Jeremiah. The number of persons choosing a particular response is given in parentheses above the number of the response. The scale of response is as follows: 1 means strongly agree, 2 means agree, 3 means uncertain, 4 means disagree, 5 means strongly disagree.

- (4) (4) (1)

1. 1 2 3 4 5 maintained my interest
- (4) (6) (2) (1)

2. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me see a contemporary issue more clearly
- (4) (3) (7)

3. 1 2 3 4 5 did not inspire me
- (8) (5) (1)

4. 1 2 3 4 5 really seemed to bring the character to life
- (1) (3) (9)

5. 1 2 3 4 5 seemed too artificial--too much like "play acting"
- (6) (6) (2)

6. 1 2 3 4 5 used words and thought patterns in present day usage
- (1) (2) (4) (7)

7. 1 2 3 4 5 lacked the directness of a conventional sermon
- (7) (4) (2)

8. 1 2 3 4 5 led me toward personal action or change
- (4) (10)

9. 1 2 3 4 5 was not very well understood by me
- (5) (5) (1)

10. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me to hear a word of judgment I needed to hear
- (10) (3) (1)

11. 1 2 3 4 5 projected an attitude of love for mankind

Table 3 (continued)

12.	(8) (4) (2)	1	2	3	4	5	helped me to understand God's love for me
13.	(8) (6)	1	2	3	4	5	helped me to understand God's love for all others
14.	(2) (10) (1) (1)	1	2	3	4	5	spoke to some of my personal needs
15.	(4) (6) (3)	1	2	3	4	5	made me feel a oneness with the character
16.	(3) (1) (5) (5)	1	2	3	4	5	did not have a sufficiently forceful conclusion
17.	(1) (3) (4) (3)	1	2	3	4	5	did not initiate an encounter between God and myself
18.	(6) (7) (1)	1	2	3	4	5	contained points that were easy to remember
19.	(10) (4)	1	2	3	4	5	made me eager to serve God more than I have served him up until now
20.	(7) (6)	1	2	3	4	5	led me to accept the message

A disturbing response is found to the statement "led me toward personal action or change." Seven persons agreed, but four were uncertain and two disagreed, so that just a little more than half of the respondents were led toward personal action or change. Here again, the concentration on Jeremiah's historical situation may have made it difficult for some persons to sense the kind of response called for, or, if they did perceive that the intention was to make them aware of the danger of excessive reliance on institutional or national religion, perhaps that was not a problem with which they personally needed to deal.

None of the respondents indicated that the sermon was not well understood.

To the statement "helped me to hear a word of judgment I needed to hear," ten agreed, one was uncertain and two disagreed strongly. Perhaps those who did not agree did not feel that Jeremiah's concerns were issues that applied to them. I feel confident that the note of judgment was present, but obviously, for several persons it was not made personal.

I am gratified that, to the statements about projecting an attitude of love for mankind and helping people to understand God's love for themselves and for others, all or almost all, indicated agreement. I feel this to be an important reaction to this particular sermon because so much of what Jeremiah has to say is negative and may be interpreted judgmentally. I take the reactions of the

respondents to be an affirmation that grace was perceived, and that by some it was perceived more personally than was judgment.

Almost all agreed that the sermon spoke to some of their personal needs.

Ten persons agreed that they felt a oneness with the character, but three were uncertain. Actually, I am surprised that the negative reaction was not stronger for this statement. Jeremiah's experiences were unique. Even though in the sermon he attempts to generalize from his experiences, persons might very well feel that their actual experiences are nothing like those of Jeremiah, and therefore, they might find it difficult to relate to him, especially when some of his symbolic gestures make him appear eccentric.

To the statement "did not have a sufficiently forceful conclusion" ten persons expressed disagreement. However, one was uncertain and three expressed agreement. I agree with the minority that the conclusion was not sufficiently forceful. I believe that the closing illustration had sufficient imagery to capture the imagination, but it can easily suggest resignation. It is Jeremiah's conclusion that, in the final analysis, God will have His way. This upholds the sovereignty of God, but may give the individual the feeling that there is very little that he/she can do. I could have been more specific and suggested that we deal with our imperfections so that God

will not have to, but I felt that this would belabor the point and reduce the effectiveness of the illustration.

Of those who responded to the statement "did not initiate an encounter between God and myself," a majority disagreed, but three were uncertain, and one agreed. In addition three persons did not respond to the statement. Such a mixed reaction is a cause for concern, for one would hope that persons felt loved, or judged, or repentent, or reconciled. At this point, this particular sermon was not as forceful as one might have desired.

Almost all the respondents agreed that the sermon contained points that were easy to remember.

To the statement "made me eager to serve God more than I have served him up until now," ten persons indicated agreement, but four persons were uncertain. No one disagreed, but four uncertain responses indicate that the sermon was not as compelling for some as one would like. I believe that it would have helped if Jeremiah had been more explicit about referring to specific actions which a contemporary person might take to be of service. The focus of the sermon was more on the necessity for upright living than on specific actions which a listener might interpret to be "service."

All respondents agreed that they were led to accept the message.

The benefits and hazards of presenting this particular character in a first person sermon. Jeremiah

is not as easy a person to present in a first person manner as the availability of material might lead one to believe. There is an abundance of material. There are many passages which would make excellent preaching texts. However, many of the experiences of Jeremiah are sufficiently foreign to a contemporary audience that the presentation of his life in an autobiographical form contains the danger of irrelevance. I believe that a number of the responses mentioned above indicate that problem. One has to be selective, then, and attempt to share those events which will be meaningful to twentieth century listeners.

If one's purpose were simply to introduce a Biblical character and his experiences, and to be satisfied if the congregation simply went away with increased information, Jeremiah's life would be easy to reconstruct. But, inasmuch as the intention is to create a sermon that also meets some personal needs of the hearers, the job becomes difficult. Even though I imposed an outline on the materials, having Jeremiah tell only those portions of his story which would support the several points of the outline, I discovered that I became bogged down in historical details which had to be dealt with if his story were to make sense.

I think that I would not choose Jeremiah again as the subject of a first person sermon. Or, if I did, I would not choose to tell as much of his story as this sermon attempts to do. I have learned from this experience

that the availability of material is not a sufficient index of the usefulness of the material for this style of preaching.

Chapter 3

PAUL AND THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

Introduction

The person chosen as the subject of a sermon to exemplify the application of the first person preaching technique to the New Testament period is the Apostle Paul. One of the obvious advantages of working with the Apostle Paul is that there is such an abundance of material to use. On the other hand, this can be a disadvantage, because as there is so much from which to choose, one is required to set certain limitations on how much to say so that enough is said to make a complete unit without, at the same time, telling his entire story. Another disadvantage is that so much of Paul's own material is philosophical monologue rather than descriptive narrative. Admittedly, The Acts of the Apostles provides a scenario, but when broken into smaller sections the description of events is rather inadequate. If one is to follow the outline of The Acts of the Apostles, it becomes necessary to make some decisions as to when, in that chain of events, a particular Epistle was written. Merging these two strands of scripture calls for imagination and conjecture. A further problem for me is that I had already preached a first

person sermon on Paul's conversion,¹ and on Paul at Athens.² Of course, there was still a great deal of material left with which to deal, but these two rather colorful events in Paul's life were not available for this particular project.

The reason for choosing this person. Paul was chosen for this sermon because I had noted in the course of preparing for a Bible study that some things he wrote in The First Letter to the Corinthians were applicable to several situations in the local church which needed to be dealt with. For one thing, considerable agitation had been expressed by a number of members of our Adult Bible Class because the points of view expressed in the class varied widely and the members were frequently at odds with one another. One would accuse another of not being Christian. Numerous persons had sought me out to complain about the situation, but because the class was held during a service of worship, I did not have the opportunity to deal with the difficulty during class time. Most of the class did attend a service of worship, and therefore, I felt that I could deal with the issue of variety of opinion from the pulpit.

¹David Rogne, "Saul of Tarsus". Sermon preached at St. Mark United Methodist Church, Santa Barbara, California, November 21, 1965.

²David Rogne, "Paul at Athens". Sermon preached at Thousand Oaks United Methodist Church, Thousand Oaks, California, July 18, 1971.

Another issue with which I had been dealing just prior to the preparation of this sermon was the subject of glossolalia. Certain charismatics in the church were wrestling with the propriety of speaking in tongues in the services of worship. I had attempted to deal with them privately about the effect this would have on the congregation. While I acknowledged this to be a scriptural gift, I urged the people to use it privately. I had spoken about the subject from the pulpit previously, expressing these views. I felt that it would be appropriate once again to speak about it in a manner which would place it in balance with other gifts of the Spirit. Paul dealt with the subject at some length in The First Letter to the Corinthians.

A third item about which I had been having considerable discussion prior to writing this sermon, was the disclosure that several persons in the church were living together with someone of the opposite sex without being married. I felt that I had a pastoral responsibility to deal privately with these persons and to indicate to them that their life style was out of keeping with the life style that the Christian church seeks to promote. The persons involved were not particularly moved by my references to scripture. They felt that there were many reasons why they could not or should not marry, and yet they chose to remain a part of the Christian fellowship. Other young people, who were not living in this manner,

were not particularly concerned that this life style was present in the church. Therefore, I felt that it was important to let other people, who might be considering such a life style, know that the church had an opinion on such matters, and that the attitude of the church is based on the New Testament. About this subject also the Apostle Paul expressed himself in The First Letter to the Corinthians.

The reason for including certain events. It should be clear from what has been said previously that the Apostle Paul is an excellent choice of persons to address the issues mentioned because he did deal with factionalism, sexual expression, and spiritual gifts. The First Letter to the Corinthians was the ideal book to use because all three of those issues are dealt with in that book. I now had the character and the situation to which he would speak. One problem, as I saw it, was that the material was quite philosophical and cerebral. Certain narrative materials needed to be inserted into Paul's written comments, not only to inform the hearers of the historical situation Paul was facing, but to provide some material which would capture the imagination. There needed to be action as well as words. For that reason, I chose to tell about the city, about the formation of the church, about Paul's travels and why he was not present to deal with the matters personally.

The reason for excluding certain events. If one were interested only in the activities of the Apostle Paul, he might choose to give a running narrative of the events found in The Acts of the Apostles. If one were interested in presenting the contents of a certain Epistle, he might attempt in a sermon to give something like a book report, which would list most of the contents of that Epistle. My intention was to have Paul speak, in ways which could be authenticated by his writings, to issues which I thought were relevant to my particular local church. Therefore, I chose to leave out references to law suits in pagan courts, meat offered to idols, women in worship services, the Lord's Supper, and the Resurrection. Each of those subjects might be beneficially dealt with at another time, but for this message it was necessary to focus on the relevant materials.

The effect of critical scholarship. Bornkamm makes the statement that The Acts of the Apostles is not necessarily historically accurate.³ He considers it to be more literary art than actual history. He suggests that The Acts of the Apostles was written toward the end of the first century, perhaps forty years after the death of Paul.⁴ With regard to the events at Corinth, however, which are

³Gunther Bornkamm, Paul (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. xv.

⁴Ibid.

found recorded in The Acts of the Apostles 18:1-17, Bornkamm believes The Acts of the Apostles to be reliable.⁵ Problems related to the Corinthian correspondence are discussed by Gilmour, who suggests that The First Letter to the Corinthians as we now have it was not originally one item of correspondence.⁶ It may well consist of material written on several occasions. Even so, the style, vocabulary, and ideas are undoubtedly Paul's,⁷ and The First Letter to the Corinthians can be readily understood as a letter composed at one time.

The resolution of certain difficulties. One needs to be informed by critical scholarship, but one can get so bogged down in trying to determine who wrote what, when and to whom, that one's whole presentation becomes guarded and unconvincing. Fortunately, as indicated above, scholars tend to agree that The First Letter to the Corinthians is substantially the work of the Apostle Paul, and that The Acts of the Apostles is historically dependable with reference to the church at Corinth.

In order to make the points I wanted to make, it was relatively easy to have Paul speak about the issues I wanted to address. I simply had him present the particular

⁵Ibid., p. 68.

⁶S. M. Gilmour, "Corinthians, First Letter To The," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of The Bible (1962), I, 688.

⁷Ibid.

problem he was concerned about in the Corinthian church and then, without being too specific, I had him make certain generalizations about problems which other churches might experience. All of this was given continuity by having Paul draw the subjects together under a heading of several things which he had discovered to be necessary for the health of a church. The subjects then flowed naturally out of the content of the Epistle.

I did not feel that it was necessary to be specific about the time or place in which Paul is speaking. He is simply giving, to anyone who will listen, the benefit of his considered opinion about what makes for a healthy church, based upon the things which he wrote to the Christians at Corinth.

Lest it seem that he is only critical of that congregation, I have him close his remarks with the observation that, in spite of the problems he had with the Corinthian church, he loved the members of the congregation as a father loves his children. The intention of such a remark is to help any who might be convicted by some of Paul's statements, to sense grace and acceptance also.

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Paul and the Church at Corinth

What is your idea of a saint? Someone who is upright, loving, pure? Someone who always does the right thing? I've known a lot of saints, but there hasn't been one of them who would fit that description. In fact, I wrote a letter a while back to folks in a church--I addressed it to "those called to be saints"--but if you knew what was going on in that church, you would probably choke if you heard them called saints. You see, my feeling is that the term "saint" is not to be applied simply to those who have arrived at a certain level of perfection, but also to those who are on their way--even if they haven't gotten very far. And believe me, this group to whom I was writing hadn't got very far.

My name is Paul, called to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ. The church to which I have just referred is the one in the city of Corinth, in Greece. In my dealings with them I learned a great deal about the nature of the church and the Christian life--somethings which might help other individuals and congregations as they deal with the nature of the church and Christian conduct. I set some of my ideas down on paper in correspondence with that church, and today I'd like to share some of my ideas with you.

Before I do that, however, I should probably give you a little background on that city and that church. Corinth was the fourth largest, and I suppose one could say,

fourth most important, city of the Roman Empire when I wrote. It was a commercial center--rich, luxurious, given to sensual pleasure. Its inhabitants were noted the world over for their lax morals. This was largely the consequence of the pagan religious rites which took place there. The temple of Aphrodite in that city had a thousand priestesses, that is, temple prostitutes, attached to it. It was a by-word in the Empire that "to live like a Corinthian" was to live a disolute life. There was a sizeable Jewish population there with an active synagogue, many of whose worshippers were not Jews, but Gentiles.

In the year 49 A.D., the Emperor Claudius issued an edict expelling Jews from Rome. As a result of that expulsion, two Christian Jews from Rome, Aquila, and his wife Priscilla, came to settle in Corinth. They were tentmakers by trade. They worshipped in the Jewish synagogue, and apparently were not very active in promoting their Christian beliefs.

About a year later I came to the city as a Christian evangelist, and since I also was a Jew, I sought out the synagogue. I needed work and a place to stay, and as I was a tentmaker, I found work and lodging with Aquila and Priscilla. As a Jew visiting from another city, I was invited to speak in the synagogue. I took advantage of the opportunity to speak and tried to convince the congregation that Jesus of Nazareth, who had been crucified and resurrected a few years before, was the expected Jewish

Messiah and the Lord of life. At first the synagogue leaders were tolerant, even though they felt that what I was advocating was heresy. But when two of my associates, Silas and Timothy, arrived in the city, the synagogue rulers began to fear a rift in the congregation, and they told me to leave.

When I withdrew from the synagogue some Jews and Gentiles who had become believers in Christ followed me. We started to meet in the home of Titius Justus, one of the converts, who happened to live right next door to the synagogue. You can imagine how that went over with the Jews! The synagogue was up in arms and made an abortive attempt to call us before the authorities. That was the stormy beginning of the church there. Our congregation was a motley assortment of Jews, Jewish proselytes, and formerly pagan Gentiles, mostly from the lower economic and social group. I stayed there about a year and a half, trying to develop that group into a Christian congregation.

Eventually I had to leave in order to report back to my sponsoring congregation in Syria. Aquila and Priscilla accompanied me to Ephesus, across the Aegean Sea from Corinth, and there they took up residence, waiting for me to come back to them there. In the meantime, a Jew by the name of Apollos, from Alexandria, arrived in Ephesus. He was a follower of Jesus, too. He was an eloquent speaker, and spoke boldly in the synagogue, but he was not acquainted with Christian baptism. So Aquila and Priscilla took him

aside and set him straight. Thereafter he wanted to go to Corinth to preach, so the Christians in Ephesus gave him a letter of recommendation and sent him off. Certainly he helped a great many there to understand the Christian faith, but his eloquence was also to be a source of trouble later.

When I arrived back in Ephesus, some people from one of the Christian families in Corinth came to pay me a visit and to bring me a letter containing certain questions. At first they tried to tell me how well everything was going in the church, but the more they talked, the more evident it became that things were not going well as all. So I wrote them a letter, partly to answer their questions, and partly to make some observations and to issue some instructions on the basis of what I had heard. Some of what I wrote to them will serve to illustrate what I want to share with you.

The first thing that my relationship with Corinth helped me to realize is that for a church to be healthy, the people in it must learn to tolerate differing opinions. That was not the case in Corinth! The church had divided itself into quarreling factions. One group was saying, "We belong to Paul's party." Another group was saying, "We belong to Apollos' party." Another group was saying, "We belong to Peter's party." Still another group, hoping to outflank the rest, was saying, "We belong to Christ," not in an effort to reconcile, but to strengthen their position.

It was not enough that they had chosen to follow one teacher or another, but they tended to discredit the teachers they did not follow, and to quarrel with the points of view each represented. One group complained that I had not been eloquent enough. I suppose they were comparing me with Apollos. I had to point out to them that if I had spoken in lofty words they wouldn't have been able to understand, for they were mostly slaves and laborers--they were not sophisticated philosophers. Besides, if I had spoken in such a manner, they might have been impressed with my rhetoric, and responded to that, but in the process have missed the core of my message, which was Christ. Others were saying that my message had been too simple--not marked by wisdom. I told them plainly that there were many deeper mysteries I could have shared with them, but they were not ready for the intricacies of theology. They had been, and were still, very immature in the faith, as their factions plainly showed. They still needed the milk of growing children--they were not ready for the meat of deep spiritual truths. I tried to show them in my letter that every teacher of the gospel has something to contribute. I planted the seed, Apollos watered, but it is God who gives the growth. We were all working together and not in competition with each other. Therefore, they ought not to be choosing up sides, and so dividing the body of Christ.

Now I share this with you because it is something

I think every local church needs to remember. We do not all have the same attitudes and opinions, but each of us is nevertheless a part of the church--the body of Christ. We have been exposed to different teachers and preachers. Some of us can accept what we have been taught without question. Others of us grow only by challenging everything because that is the kind of mind we have been given. For some of us, faith has come easily; for others, it has been a fight all the way. Some of us never doubted; others of us can scarcely believe. A dynamic, healthy church, then, is not one that is marked by uniformity of opinion, but by charity. We may never agree on that final statement of What-is-to-be-believed-at-all-costs, for one will say that that is too much to expect, while another will say it is not enough. To hold an opinion is one thing--to attempt to discredit all who do not subscribe to it is another. God has given us our minds, which are informed by our individual experiences and by varied teachers. It is to be expected, then, that we may not always agree. But God has also given us the spirit of Christ, so that we may express our opinions in love, and not think that we alone have the truth.

The second thing that I learned from my relationship with the church at Corinth is that if a church is going to be healthy, the people in it must learn to keep their physical and spiritual natures in balance. That was not happening in Corinth! A case in point is that I had

been told that a man was living with his stepmother, and the church tolerated it. Roman and Jewish law both forbade that kind of a relationship. Should it exist in the church and the church not deal with it? The church was situated in a particularly sensual city but it was taking its life style from that city. I told them that the situation was intolerable. Does that sound strange in the light of what I said previously about difference of opinion being tolerated? I think tolerance of opinion is one thing, but for a church to approve of members who live in open contempt of all that it stands for is something else. Such tolerance would eventually undermine the morale of the whole church.

I had written to the church before, urging them to separate from immoral persons. They wrote back that that was impossible because the world was full of them. I answered that I didn't mean that they should have nothing to do with such people in the world--you would have to leave the world to get away from such people--but they must not let a Christian brother who is unrepentant continue in the church without challenging him. Let's face it, all of us have been subject to temptation and sin. Those of us inside the church are no better than those outside the church in that regard. But the difference is that as Christians we have acknowledged our weaknesses and we have expressed our desire to be different than we have been. We are repentant. Our thinking has been set

right through our commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, at Corinth there were also some "spiritually elite" persons, who had developed the opinion that once you had attained a certain level of spirituality, it didn't matter what you did. "The body is physical, and has physical needs," they taught. "The real person is spiritual, and what is done sexually has no more effect on the spirit than what one eats." Here was a Christian church where some were going overboard in unrestrained physical satisfaction, and others, emphasizing their spiritual attainments, were winding up in exactly the same place.

What I told them, I now tell you. As a Christian your body is a member of Christ's body, and your spirit is knit with His. There is something unique about sexual union in that it is intended to signify our oneness with the partner in the act. If the union is an immoral one, we are making Christ's body, of which we are a member, part of that union, and that must not be. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, therefore we are to glorify God with our bodies and to see to it that our physical drives are held in balance by our spiritual commitments.

It just so happened that the Corinthians had written to ask me some questions about marriage, and my answers to their questions may help me to throw a little more light on this difficult issue of sexual expression. All of us have physical appetites, whether we are Christian or pagan. It would be unreasonable to pretend that they

don't exist. But as Christians we belong to Christ, so we have a higher purpose than simply fulfilling our physical desires. Therefore, if we are to satisfy our physical needs in a way that takes account of our Christian commitment, it seems to me that it can only be within the context of marriage. I am aware that some people feel that my view of marriage is rather inadequate, but you have to consider the context in which I was writing. All of us expected the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Marriage tended to complicate one's life--to increase worldly anxieties. So I counseled people that if they could contain their passions, they ought not to marry--the time would be short anyway. But if they couldn't contain themselves, it would be better to marry than to be tempted by immorality. I have to confess that that makes marriage sound terribly pragmatic and impersonal--just a way to avoid immorality. Of course, I know there is more to it--some of my other correspondence acknowledges the elements of love and companionship and responsibility. But at that moment I was talking about the problem of immorality, and the other attributes of marriage didn't seem to me to be relevant. What it comes down to is this--we are physical and we are spiritual beings and as Christians we need to learn to meet our physical needs in a manner which is consistent with our Christian commitment.

The last thing I want to share with you this morning from my relationship with the church at Corinth is my observation that for a church to be healthy, its

people must learn to have a balanced appreciation for the endowments of others. At Corinth people were competing with each other for prominence in the church. For example, some people had the rather spectacular ability to speak in ecstatic utterances. It made no sense to those who heard it, but those who possessed it were lording it over those who did not have it as though it were the foremost of God's gifts. I advised them that, while it may be a gift, it is only one gift among many, and certainly not the most useful gift, for it would be far better to speak five words that others could understand than to speak ten thousand in an unintelligible tongue. Having said that, it was also important to put the gift of preaching into a proper perspective, for preaching, too, is a highly visible phenomenon, and those who are so gifted are tempted to exalt that gift and to be highly exalted by others. The truth of the matter is that God has given many gifts to his church, and each one is to be valued in its own right. Those who have the more public gifts are certainly to exercise them, but they ought not to downgrade those whose gifts are less spectacular. I reiterated in my letter, that we are all together the body of Christ, and that each of us is to exercise his gift for the common good.

Every local church needs to remember that. The local church needs what every person has to offer--teaching, making music, speaking, administrating, visiting, serving, challenging, preaching, and so forth. Whatever contribution

a person can make is his own unique gift for the common good, and the congregation would be poorer without it. Some people discount their own contribution, feeling that they have nothing to offer, but that just isn't true. Almost all of us can express love to someone--and that is the greatest gift of all. It enhances every other gift we may have, and even when it is by itself, love is at the top of the list. I urge you, as I urged the Corinthians, "make love your aim."

Let me close my remarks by acknowledging what should be quite evident--that in many ways Corinth was a troublesome church. But what is there that is alive and growing that does not give trouble? In a way, dealing with the church at Corinth was like raising a child--often exasperating, but ultimately rewarding. I was their father and they were my children. In our relationship, they learned from me, but, as I have attempted to make plain in what I have said, I also learned from them.

Your situation may not be the same as that of the church at Corinth, but if you are a congregation of lively and growing people, I can only assume that there have been, or are, or will be difficulties among you, too. When there are difficulties, remember my words about the need for balance in all of life. Balance your opinions with the opinions of others and you will come to realize that no one person has all the truth--yourself included. Balance your physical needs with your spiritual responsibilities and

your conduct will bring credit to the Lord whose name you bear. Distribute your appreciation generously among all those who serve and you will encourage them to exercise the gifts that God has given them for the benefit of all God's children.

Evaluation of the Sermon

Results of the Questionnaire. A compilation of the responses of thirteen persons to the Paul sermon follows on the next page. Most respondents felt that their interest was maintained. Most felt helped in seeing a contemporary issue more clearly, though there was a spread that kept that statement from being clear-cut. Most felt that the sermon was inspiring, though there were several who were uncertain or disagreed; most felt that the sermon brought the character to life, but two persons disagreed. One of those who disagreed suggested that, while he liked first person sermons, he felt that such sermons were best when the person was involved in specific actions or events. He felt that Paul's experience with Corinth was not enough of a personal story--it was too much commentary on what Paul himself had written to someone, rather than a description of his own actions.

Most respondents did not feel that the sermon was artificial, but there was a spread of opinion, which is disturbing. My interpretation is that those who did feel the technique was artificial felt that the issues being dealt with were not pertinent to them. Perhaps they felt that I was compelled by choice of the text to speak on issues which I had not purposely selected, and therefore, that these issues were not relevant to persons in our congregation. Perhaps the approach was too oblique for these persons to make application to the people of our time.

TABLE 4

A COMPILATION OF RESPONSES TO THE
SERMON REACTION QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR PAUL THE APOSTLE

The following is a compilation of the reactions of thirteen persons to the sermon Paul. The number of persons choosing a particular response is given in parentheses above the number of the response. The scale of response is as follows: 1 means strongly agree, 2 means agree, 3 means uncertain, 4 means disagree, 5 means strongly disagree.

1. (5) (7) (1)
 1 2 3 4 5 maintained my interest
2. (6) (4) (2) (1)
 1 2 3 4 5 helped me see a contemporary issue
 more clearly
3. (2) (1) (7) (2)
 1 2 3 4 5 did not inspire me
4. (8) (3) (2)
 1 2 3 4 5 really seemed to bring the character
 to life
5. (1) (2) (1) (2) (7)
 1 2 3 4 5 seemed too artificial--too much like
 "play-acting"
6. (5) (8)
 1 2 3 4 5 used words and thought patterns in
 present day usage
7. (1) (5) (7)
 1 2 3 4 5 lacked the directness of a conventional
 sermon
8. (3) (9) (1)
 1 2 3 4 5 led me toward personal action or change
9. (3) (1) (4) (5)
 1 2 3 4 5 was not very well understood by me
10. (3) (7) (3)
 1 2 3 4 5 helped me to hear a word of judgment I
 needed to hear
11. (7) (4) (2)
 1 2 3 4 5 projected an attitude of love for mankind

Table 4 (continued)

12. (4) (7) (1)
1 2 3 4 5 helped me to understand God's love
for me
13. (3) (8) (2)
1 2 3 4 5 helped me to understand God's love
for all others
14. (1) (6) (4) (1)
1 2 3 4 5 spoke to some of my personal needs
15. (2) (8) (1) (2)
1 2 3 4 5 made me feel a oneness with the
character
16. (1) (2) (4) (5) (1)
1 2 3 4 5 did not have a sufficiently forceful
conclusion
17. (6) (2) (3) (2)
1 2 3 4 5 did not initiate an encounter between
God and myself
18. (4) (8) (1)
1 2 3 4 5 contained points that were easy to
remember
19. (2) (5) (3) (3)
1 2 3 4 5 made me eager to serve God more than
I have served him up until now
20. (7) (4) (2)
1 2 3 4 5 led me to accept the message

.

All respondents agreed that the sermon used words and thought patterns in present day usage; most felt that the sermon had the directness of a conventional sermon.

The response to the statement "led me toward personal action or change" is disturbing. Most respondents indicated that they were uncertain. Certainly the intention of the sermon is to move persons toward action or change. The problem here may be that most of the persons responding simply could not identify with the topics being dealt with. Obviously, not enough persons were acquainted with the problem in the Adult Bible Class to be able to make the necessary application of Paul's words on factions. Neither would most persons be acquainted with the feelings of certain charismatics who wanted to speak in tongues. Moreover, several persons filling out the questionnaire, upon returning it to me, said that while they recognized the problem of sexual immorality, that was not a problem for them. It was almost as though they wanted to assure me that that was not an area in which they needed help. I assume that this means, therefore, that they had no need to change. While I acknowledge that this failure to lead persons toward action or change is a fault of this particular sermon, I am not convinced that it is necessarily a problem stemming from the technique of first person preaching. Either the application was too oblique, or too few persons felt involvement in the topics being considered, or there were too many major subjects for one message.

The fault, I think, lies in the preacher who prepared the message, and not in the technique.

Most persons felt that the sermon was understood, but there was a spread of opinion, no doubt related to the reasons mentioned above. Most persons felt that they were helped to hear a word of judgment which they needed to hear, but several persons were uncertain. Most persons felt that the sermon projected an attitude of love for mankind, which is gratifying, considering that Paul was being critical of several human characteristics. Most persons also said they felt helped in understanding God's love for themselves and for all others. I feel that this comes about, in large measure, from the statements of Paul toward the end of the message that he felt like a father to the people in the church at Corinth, and that, in spite of difficulties he had with persons in that church, he nevertheless had a fondness for them.

To the statement, "spoke to my personal needs," the response was mixed. It is possible to say that most agreed, but one disagreed strongly and four persons were uncertain. I take this to mean that the subjects dealt with were not felt needs of a sizeable number of respondents, and therefore, the same could be said for the congregation as a whole. Most persons said they felt a oneness with the character, but there was some spread here too. These two responses lead me to believe that the technique made it possible for persons to identify with Paul, but

not necessarily to put themselves in the place of those whom Paul was addressing.

There was a mixed response to the statement "did not have a sufficiently forceful conclusion". The conclusion was a brief recapitulation of the major points made in the sermon. I felt that the unifying theme was the nature of the church and of Christian conduct. Therefore, even though the sermon was composed of several sub-topics, I felt that they were adequately welded together by the theme. I felt that a reiteration of the sub-topics would tend to reinforce the theme and make it applicable to this particular congregation. I suspect that the congregation was simply too ignorant of the reality of these problems to feel that the sermon was forcefully concluded.

The response to the statement "did not initiate an encounter with God and myself" was also mixed. While some disagreed or were uncertain, the largest single response was "Agreed". This is the common thread of lack of personal application which has been evident in other responses.

Almost all persons felt that the sermon contained points which were easy to remember. While more persons responded favorably than unfavorably to the statement about being motivated to serve God, there was a mixed reaction.

Finally, most persons indicated that they were led

to accept the message.

The benefits and hazards of presenting this particular character in a first person sermon. It is not difficult to preach on Paul. There is considerable material about his life, and an abundance of material about his thought. In a more conventional preaching style his theological statements may be applied and illustrated by reference to contemporary incidents. In the first person preaching style, however, one is confined either to the incident Paul happens to be addressing or to something about which he could conceivably have knowledge in his own time frame. Consequently, when one is dealing with theological or philosophical concepts within the limitations of an autobiographical presentation, one may find it difficult to develop the verisimilitude which will make the incident live for a contemporary congregation. I personally felt that contemporary application was accomplished in this sermon. The fact that most respondents indicated that their interest was maintained, that they were helped to see a contemporary issue more clearly, that they were inspired, that they felt the character had been brought to life, that they felt the sermon had directness, and that they were led to accept the message, would at least partly support my assumption. It is in the statements involving personal action, or change, or motivation, that this assumption is challenged. I feel that the sermon certainly helped the people to become more informed about the Apostle Paul and

about some of the situations he faced in his ministry. Where there are problems of motivation (obviously not everyone was unmotivated!) I think that the reason is two-fold: the issues addressed were not personal problems of a large enough number of respondents; and the material used contained too much that was of an epistolary nature, and not enough narrative.

Chapter 4

HUGH LATIMER

Introduction

The person chosen as the subject of a sermon to exemplify the application of the first person preaching technique to the period of the Reformation is the English Reformer, Hugh Latimer. An advantage in using Hugh Latimer is that he is not well known to the average Sunday morning worshipper and therefore, there is the possibility of sustaining interest in the hearer who will not be so familiar with the events of Latimer's life as to turn a deaf ear to the story. On the other hand, the hearers' unfamiliarity with Latimer means that one must provide greater detail about the life of Latimer in order to make the story flow smoothly. Moreover, the preacher cannot depend upon a ready-made interest such as one might find in speaking on Martin Luther or John Wesley.

The reason for choosing this person. A Reformer was chosen on this occasion because the sermon was being presented on Reformation Sunday. The congregation had already become acquainted with Martin Luther and John Wesley, and the effect which they had on the development of the church. It therefore seemed appropriate for this Methodist

congregation to become aware of the development of its antecedent body, the Church of England. It occurred to me that on this Reformation Sunday a Protestant congregation would be benefited to learn something from its heritage and to be reminded that living by conscience may be significant even if costly. While the problems encountered by Hugh Latimer are not identical with those of modern day Christians, the specifics of Latimer's case could be generalized for the edification of twentieth century Christians. It would seem to be important, then, not simply to tell Latimer's story, though this might be inspirational, but to allow Latimer to reflect on certain of his experiences which might be helpful to contemporary individuals.

The reason for including certain events. One must make some decisions as to what will be included in a sermon based on the life of an individual. One could, of course, spend the entire sermon simply recounting the experiences of the individual. This could be made interesting, but when one is dealing with someone from the sixteenth century, his experiences may not appear relevant to a twentieth century congregation. Therefore, one must become familiar with the life of the subject and seek out those particular experiences which do have some relevance for today. I studied Latimer's life carefully, and from the material I felt that I could focus on several events in his life which

might help people of this generation. In addition to helping people understand the formation of the Church of England, I felt that Latimer could also help people to understand how a person changes his/her mind on important religious issues, how one might make a mistake by relying on the power of the state to enforce religious opinion, and how one manages to hold up under persecution for conscience's sake. I felt that the sermon could accomplish these several things and at the same time tell the story of Hugh Latimer.

The reason for excluding certain events. With an entire life from which to choose, it does become necessary to be selective. Some things which might be interesting in their own right, or even important to the life of Hugh Latimer, did not need to be included because they would tend to be extraneous to the major points being made. For example, it was not important to indicate that while he was a bishop, most of Latimer's time and interests were spent on political matters. Within the time limits of a sermon one needs to choose what is germane.

The effect of historical scholarship. One has to beware of making a person more saintly than he was. There is a natural tendency to elevate the characteristics of past church leaders. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to show some of the fallacies of Latimer's thinking, so that he might be seen as a human being. For this reason, I had

him comment on his own willingness to use the power of the state when it served his interest. One could go further and speak of the times when Latimer was himself involved in the persecution of heretics, even preaching sermons at the sites where other persons were being burned at the stake.¹ But Latimer was a man of his times and our sensitivities must not be imposed upon him. If he is to be an acceptable hero for our age, he must either comment on such events apologetically, or not mention them at all. As I felt it would serve no creative purpose to have him mention his involvement in such barbarities, I chose to omit references to such events. The biographical material used for this sermon on Latimer was not always in agreement as to when a particular event took place.² There were those persons who accused him of being self-serving in some of his services for the King.³ Since that was the case, I had Latimer acknowledge the charge, but give his explanation as to why he did what he did. Where there is disagreement about a date or an event, I found it convenient to generalize the remark in such a way as to include diverse opinions. For

¹Alan G. Chester, Hugh Latimer, Apostle To The English (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), p. 132.

²Alan Chester even disagrees with himself as to whether Latimer was born around 1480 or 1492. cf. Ibid., p. 2. But see also, Hugh Latimer, Selected Sermons of Hugh Latimer (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), p. xiii.

³Chester, p. 102.

example, it is not even clear when he was born, so I simply had him refer to the decade in to which he was born, rather than to the year. In another instance, where there is some question as to who was behind the request for his resignation from his episcopacy, I had him plead ignorance as to who was actually behind that request.⁴

The resolution of certain difficulties. One area calling for creativity in first person preaching is the selection of the point of view from which the subject is to speak and tell his/her story. One could have him/her coming back from the dead with full knowledge of all that happened in the time since his/her death. When that is the point of view chosen, it becomes easy for him/her to draw conclusions from his/her life which are applicable to his/her twentieth century audience. One could have him/her tell his/her story without reference to his/her own end. Or one could have him/her tell his/her story to imaginary contemporaries of his/hers who have, for one reason or another, come to speak with him/her. I have not yet discovered a satisfactory way of having an individual speak about his/her own death as something through which he/she has passed, for at that point his/her story would become incredible and removed from reality. Yet, in the case of this particular character, it is a statement made at the time of his death, for which Latimer is most remembered.

⁴Ibid., p. 149-151.

How could this be presented to the congregation without having Latimer look back on his own death? I decided that the setting for the sermon could be in Latimer's prison cell, the night before his execution. That would be an appropriate time for him to reflect upon all of his life. At that time we would have almost all of the material of his life before him. In order to get his final statement before the congregation, I had the following item printed in the bulletin beneath the title of the sermon:

On October 16, 1555, Hugh Latimer and his good friend, Nicklaus Ridley, were burned at the stake outside of Oxford, England. As the torch was applied and the flames mounted, Latimer spoke: "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace⁵ in England as I trust shall never be put out."

Honesty with the historical situation required admitting that Latimer was no longer at the height of his personal vigor. The statement made at the opening of the sermon indicates this. However, one could not go on through an entire sermon portraying a sick and broken man, and expect to maintain the interest of the congregation. Therefore, I proceed on the assumption that as Latimer unfolds his story, his personality also begins to blossom, and that as he recounts the events of his years of strength, he temporarily regains his power of preaching because of the emotions which the subjects arouse. As the sermon comes to

⁵Latimer, p. xxxiv.

a close, he once again displays evidence that he is old and tired. But now, even though not marked by the vigor of the central portion of the sermon, he has sufficient clarity of thought to enable him to explain why he has said what he has said.

In an effort to have Latimer speak a relevant word to a twentieth century audience I cause him to comment on the issues of church and state. For him to have done so in the manner I have suggested would have been treasonous. He was a child of his time. He probably would not have questioned the Divine Right of Kings, nor the king's involvement in the affairs of the church. But the exercise of "sanctified imagination" helps one to see that Latimer might very well have reflected on the problems of church and state as he sat in his prison cell, condemned to death, at least partly because of the king's authority within the church.

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Hugh Latimer

What did you expect to find in this prison cell today? Someone larger than life? Someone as articulate as Demosthenes, as robust as Samson, as fearless as Joshua? If so, you have come to the wrong place. Oh yes, there was a time when I was called "Hugh Latimer, the Apostle to the English," and by that title people meant to characterize my qualities of leadership, vigor and oratory. But now I am an old man, sick, tired, not always able to think clearly.

Why, only a few days ago I was called before the court to give an accounting once again of all that I believe. I was too weak to speak. I prepared my remarks in advance, but no one would read them. "Recant," they said. "Others have. Be reconciled with the Pope and go free." No, that I could not do. Take back everything for which I had stood and go free? No. God will give me the capacity to endure whatever I must. I suffer from too many months in the confinement of this cold prison cell--but tomorrow that will be taken care of. This old tent, this body in which I now live will be offered up, and I shall be free indeed.

These past months in prison certainly have given me opportunity to reflect. I have thought of my childhood, my Cambridge days, the ups and downs of life in the church. I've been a preacher in my time--a good one too--and I could preach again, if God would give the strength. But

for now indulge the need of an old man to reminisce, and perhaps, from what I say, some good will come to you. You can trust the words of a dying preacher--I have no need to lie.

I think of my early life and I am impressed by how simple things seemed then. I was born in the little town of Thurcaston, Leicestershire, in the last decade of the fifteenth century. My father was a farmer--not well off, but able to send me to the university.

I entered Cambridge University in 1506, taking my Master's degree in 1514. I had by then decided to enter the priesthood, and I was ordained deacon in 1515. While preparing for my Bachelor of Divinity degree in the field of Medieval Theology, I was appointed a University preacher and Keeper of the Cross.

During those years of theological preparation, religious studies in Europe were in ferment. Erasmus had developed a new text of the Greek New Testament which was calling into question the authority of our Latin Bible, and causing some students to favor study of the Bible over theology. Martin Luther's doctrine of justification by faith was causing others to question the adequacy of the ceremonies and teachings of the church as instruments of salvation. I was dismayed and angered at the freedom with which some of my colleagues proclaimed new doctrines. I denounced them and the "New Learning" they espoused. I even interrupted their lectures and urged their students

not to listen to them. As I look back on it now, I was as obstinate a papist as any in England. In my disputation for the divinity degree in 1524, I attacked the views of the Swiss reformer, Philip Melanchthon, and was awarded the degree. I was as zealous in my persecution of the new learning as the young Saul of Tarsus had been zealous in his persecution of early Christians. Little did I realize that our lives would follow a similar course.

The second thing you need to know about me is that my mind changed. Listening to my arguments against Melanchthon was a fervent preacher of the new doctrines, by the name of Thomas Bilney. He apparently saw in me someone who was zealous, but without knowledge. Perhaps the very vehemence of my arguments convinced Bilney that I was really insecure in the positions I was defending. In any case, Bilney asked if he might come to me to make confession. His real purpose was to use the opportunity to instruct me in the new theology, and he led me to a rather sudden and intense conversion. I came to accept justification by faith and the authority of the Bible, and to question the value of many of the rituals and ceremonies of the church. Inwardly, I became the very thing I had previously hated--a Protestant. Thereafter, Bilney and I would walk and talk often on Castle Hill, a place that came to be known as "Heretics' Hill" after it became clear to others what we were talking about. The more we talked, the more inflamed I became about such things as the sale of

indulgences by the church, the abuses of religion, excessive devotion to saints and relics, and laxity in church discipline.

It was one thing to be inflamed and to talk quietly-- it was another to speak openly. As University Chaplain I had that opportunity, and I took advantage of it. I spoke against excessive devotion to saints, veneration of relics, and pilgrimages to shrines. I also spoke out for the need for the Bible to be in the language of the people, for only the Latin Bible was authorized. There was a translation available in English, but it was illegal for anyone to buy or to sell, or to possess a copy. I pleaded for an authorized English translation to be prepared.

My words offended the conservative churchmen at Cambridge and elsewhere. To some I sounded like a Lutheran. A heated controversy developed, with those of us who wanted to reform the church on one side, and those who wanted to keep the church as it was on the other side. It is always that way in the church. As soon as some one expresses an opinion or tries to do something differently, there is controversy. The easiest and safest thing is to do nothing at all. That way you will offend least. But what if your conscience requires you to speak or act? Then you had better be prepared for conflict, for you will have it. I was one who had to speak; conscience would not allow otherwise. Because of my outspoken appeal for an English Bible, I was called before Cardinal Wolsey on

charges of heresy, along with several others who had been distributing copies of the Scriptures in English. The others were treated harshly and condemned for their activity. I was examined and only admonished for expressing my views. Though I was not found guilty of heresy, I was a marked man--someone who would be watched by the conservative element in the church.

The controversy continued with each side attacking the views and leaders of the other. I was no better than the rest. In fact, as a speaker of some ability, I often had the upper hand in our verbal battles, but I also made some permanent enemies among the opposition. When the arguments threatened to divide the University, the king's provost intervened and urged us to be more discreet. He did this at a time when my side had the advantage, and it was apparent to many that King Henry himself favored the reformers. Naturally, I was gratified to have the king take notice, and to enter the argument, apparently on our side.

What I have said thus far will at least serve to indicate how a person's mind changes--how an ardent supporter of the status quo can become an ardent supporter of change. If I had been a little more reflective and a little less zealous, perhaps I would have realized earlier that even as I was acting from conscience, so were my opponents. Had we acted with greater love and charity we would have been less intent on destroying each other and more intent

on winning each other. But that was not to be. I saw the Roman Church and many of the trappings that went with it as the enemy of true religion. And those who supported the Roman Church felt that we, who wanted to reform the church and make it English, were the enemies of true religion. At the moment it was we reformers who seemed to have the advantage of the king's favor, and we were not above using it.

What I would like to do next is to help you see how dangerous it is for individual conscience when the authority of the church is wedded to the power of the state. As I look back on it now, I should have been more wary of the support of the king. I should have paid greater attention to the admonition of the Psalmist who said, "Put not your trust in princes", for I was eventually to discover that the favor of the ruler is a sword that cuts two ways. If you think that you can use the state to further the interests of religion, do not be surprised if the state or the ruler have it in mind to use religion to further the interests of the state. And once you have accepted an alliance between church and state because it favors your cause, do not be surprised that that alliance can also work against your cause. My own life has been a series of ups and downs brought about by the favor or disfavor of one ruler or another. Let me share some of these happenings with you.

During the time of which I was speaking earlier,

King Henry VIII was married to Catherine of Aragon, who happened to be his brother's childless widow. After some years of marriage, the King indicated that his conscience was now troubled, for he felt that this kind of relationship was contrary to scripture and to nature. He sought an annulment from Rome, but for political reasons the Pope was slow to act. On recommendation of Thomas Cranmer, the King referred his case to the faculties of the universities of Europe, to see if they would support the King's contention. At Cambridge, I willingly took responsibility for securing faculty support for the King's cause, for it seemed to me that he was correct. When the issue ended in the King's favor, he showed his gratitude by inviting me to preach at Windsor Castle and by making me his close confidant. Subsequently, the King rewarded me by appointing me rector of the parish in West Kingston. It felt good to bask in the favor of the King. It did not occur to me then that things could as easily go another way.

I was convinced that the King was in a reforming mood. If those of us interested in reforming the church could find protection in the King's favor, well and good. Let me illustrate what that protection meant. Once, while visiting in London, I was prevailed upon to preach in a church there. I didn't have permission of the Bishop of London to preach, but I yielded to the pressure and preached anyway. I spoke against the necessity of pilgrimages and devotion to saints, and especially against the reliance by

Bishops on informants in judging heretics. As I look back on it now, I am sure I was asked to preach in order that I might be trapped. I was called to trial by the Bishop of London on the charge of heresy. As was customary, I was already presumed guilty--the only question was the degree of guilt and the nature of the punishment. I insisted that I had not condemned Catholic doctrine or practices, only their abuses. I was about to be excommunicated when someone in a position of power--I believe it was the King--applied pressure, and the charges were reduced. Before the trial was over, however, I was required to submit to an admission of heretical doctrines with no specifics mentioned. It was this charge which put me in future jeopardy, for while there might be forgiveness for a repentant heretic, if one were found guilty of heresy a second time, he would be burned at the stake.

I kept a low profile for about a year after that, grateful for the intervention of the King, and unwilling to fall into the hands of those who opposed reform. In the meantime, the King, seeking to strengthen his position against the Pope, required the leaders of the church to acknowledge the King as the sole protector and supreme head of the church and clergy of England. As far as we reformers were concerned, this was our declaration of independence from Rome. What we were not so willing to recognize then, was that the church was now deprived of independent action and had become subject to the state. Taking advantage of

what I felt to be the King's favor, I spoke out again against the necessity of venerating saints, making pilgrimages, lighting candles. I criticized the excessive veneration of Mary, the doctrine of purgatory, the saying of masses for the dead and the sale of indulgences. I urged people to give money for the relief of the poor and the sick, rather than to spend it on masses for the dead. But neither the people nor the King were ready for these latter reforms, and I was forbidden to preach for a time.

Again, this was but a temporary setback, for the King soon had new reasons for encouraging the reformers. In 1532, Thomas Cranmer was made Archbishop of Canterbury upon nomination of the King. Shortly thereafter, he declared the King's first marriage invalid, and Anne Boleyn, whom the King had privately married, was crowned Queen. The Pope, in turn, now declared that the first marriage was valid, and Henry began to fear possible attack from the Papacy, the Holy Roman Empire and France. Seeking allies for a possible conflict, Henry turned to the Protestant Princes of Germany, who had themselves only recently identified with the Reform movement. The German princes, however, felt that Henry was not a genuine reformer, only an opportunist. So, in order to improve his image abroad, Henry was quite willing to grant greater latitude to those of us who would reform the English church. I had liberty to preach and was invited to preach at Court. I was appointed one of the King's chaplains,

and in 1535, three other reform-minded clergy and I were elevated to the office of Bishop.

I am aware that some people have accused me of being a timeserver--seeking advancement by serving the King. I do not deny that I was as ambitious as anyone. I was aware that advancement came as a result of the King's favor. But first and foremost I looked for the reform of the English church, and it was apparent to me that that could only be accomplished with the help of the King. He needed us, and we needed him--about that we were all realists. What many of us reformers did not fully comprehend at the time, was the potential for ill which we had allowed to accumulate in the hands of the monarch by granting him supremacy in the church. I am not sure we could have prevented this amalgamation if we had wanted to--and at the time we did not want to, for we believed that separation of England from papal jurisdiction would result in the fruition of much that we hoped for. We discovered subsequently, however, that the cost was to be frightening--for our opponents and for ourselves.

By now I had become a principal spokesman for the new state church. In 1536, the Archbishop invited me to deliver the keynote sermon to the convocation of church leaders assembled to formulate articles of religion for the new Church of England. My sermon took all day to deliver. In the morning I spoke against abuses of church ritual and doctrine, and in the afternoon I attacked the

corruption and incompetence of the higher clergy. Many of those present had served on the committee that, just four years earlier, had tried me for heresy. It was apparent to all which way the wind was blowing.

What we reformers had long sought now seemed to be taking place. In The Ten Articles of Religion adopted by the Convocation, the basic doctrines of the faith were more clearly spelled out and abuses were corrected. The following year the King set his seal of approval on the first authorized English Bible. Monasteries, which I felt to be seed-beds of superstition, were being dissolved. And shrines and relics were being destroyed.

But, alas, all was not well with the Reformation. The closing of the monasteries became less an act of reform and more an act of greed and avarice for those who received the lands. Too often those destroying shrines and relics were only interested in taking the gold associated with them. When I suggested that priests might marry in order to correct sexual abuses, that confession to a priest was unnecessary, and that the body and blood of Jesus need not be thought to be present in the mass, it was too much for the King. Henry became increasingly disenchanted with the opinions of some of the more advanced reformers, and required Parliament to pass "An Act Abolishing Diversity of Opinion," later called "The Six Articles." The sword was beginning to cut the other way.

In 1539, Thomas Cromwell, the Vicar General,

perhaps seeing his own days numbered, came to me privately and informed me that the King desired me to resign my Bishopric. I did so, assuming that it was the King's request. Later the King said he had not requested my resignation. I do not know who was telling the truth, but the King made no effort to restore my office. In fact, my resignation was viewed as a protest against the policies of King and church, treason and heresy, and I was imprisoned for several months, daily expecting to hear that I had been sentenced to burn at the stake, for this had already happened to many of the reformers. Later, I was released under a general pardon but forbidden to preach or to come within ten miles of London.

I did my best to stay away from London, but in 1546 a tree fell on me, and I went to London for medical help. While I was there, a friend of mine was being tried for heretical views, and I was requested to make a statement in his behalf. My own statement about what takes place in the mass came close to opposing the stated position of King and church, and I was imprisoned again for eighteen months, this time in the Tower. It appeared that my life was finished.

In January, 1547, however, Henry VIII died, and was succeeded by his young son, Edward VI. The young King was under the guidance of Edward Seymour, who was elected Lord Protector, and who favored the Reformation. Again, the fortunes of the Reformation were looking up. I and a

number of other reformers were released from prison under a general pardon. Heresy laws were relaxed, and then repealed altogether, allowing greater freedom of opinion. Restrictions placed on the use of the English Bible were removed. I was invited to preach at court frequently, and encouraged to preach throughout the realm on subjects which were important to me. I called for a preaching clergy to bring England to righteousness, referring to non-preaching clergy as strawberry preachers who "come but once a year and tarry not long." I spoke against masses for the dead, calling those who sold them "purgatory pick-purses." I spoke against the sale of offices, personal immorality, public corruption, the bribing of judges, the false embrace of reformed religion for the purpose of getting monastery lands. I spoke against certain agricultural policies which were strangling the poor farmers and driving them from the land. I also spoke publicly against the mass, and rejected the idea that the wine and bread become the body and blood of Jesus. As far as we reformers were concerned, the sun was shining again, and we did not consider that it might set.

In July, 1553, Edward VI, the boy-king, died. Mary Tudor, an ardent Roman Catholic, was proclaimed queen. For her, Catholicism meant old doctrines, old liturgy, old ceremonies and customs--and these views were still shared by the majority of the people, for there is a conservatism, inherent in religion, that causes people to favor the old

and familiar. She also favored reconciliation with Rome. Under her guidance the mass was restored and England was returned to obedience to the Pope.

The reformers who had attacked the mass, now were faced with the choice of recanting their positions, going into exile, or remaining to face death. My friends urged me to flee to the continent. Others were doing so. Even the government seemed to prefer that we do that. But I was too old, too sick, too tired to flee. Besides, I would be running away from everything for which I had stood. I was brought before the Privy Council, found to be seditious, and sent to the Tower along with Nicholas Ridley and Thomas Cranmer, there to await further trial. Months later we were brought to trial here in Oxford and urged to accept the Catholic position on the mass or face the consequences. When we refused, we were excommunicated, and had every reason to expect swift execution. But it took a while for Parliament to reenact the old statutes regarding the burning of heretics, so I have been waiting in this cold, damp cell for eighteen months.

Ridley and I were examined again, just a few days ago. They urged us to recant, to be reconciled with the Pope and go free. By the grace of God, Ridley and I have managed to hold up under it all. Now, they say, tomorrow is the day we are called upon to make the final sacrifice. May God grant that we give a good testimony to what we believe.

My reasons for telling you all of this are several. For one thing, I wanted you to be aware of the price paid by some for Protestant Christianity. I wanted you to see what happens when the power of the state is used to enforce the opinions of religion. May God forgive me for the times I allowed that power to be used in my behalf. And finally, I want to encourage you to live by conscience. It will not be easy. You may suffer for it. But suffering for conscience's sake brings character to the individual, and in the long run, I believe that it brings justice to the nation and nobility to the race.

Evaluation of the Sermon

Results of the questionnaires. An indication of the responses of 14 persons to the Latimer sermon follows on the next page. All respondents felt that their interest was maintained. Most felt helped in seeing a contemporary issue more clearly; most felt personally inspired by the sermon; all felt that it brought the character to life; all felt that the method was not too artificial; all but one felt that the sermon used words and thought patterns in present day usage; most felt that the sermon had the directness of a conventional sermon.

An area of concern is the unclear response to the statement: "led me toward personal action or change." Four persons agreed, five were uncertain, and five disagreed. My assessment of this response is that most people who responded could not be sure what they were being asked to do. A large portion of the sermon was spent describing the problems which arise when church and state are not separate, but most twentieth century Americans do not feel that the separation of church and state is something about which they need to be immediately concerned. They have not experienced persecution by the state for their religious faith. My intention was to offer a warning to keep vigilant in this area, but the ambiguity of the responses indicates that the respondents did not feel that vigilance in this area is important.

TABLE 5

A COMPILATION OF RESPONSES TO THE
SERMON REACTION QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR HUGH LATIMER

The following is a compilation of the reactions of fourteen persons to the sermon Hugh Latimer. The number of persons choosing a particular response is given in parentheses above the number of the response. The scale of response is as follows: 1 means strongly agree, 2 means agree, 3 means uncertain, 4 means disagree, 5 means strongly disagree.

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|--|
| | (9) | (5) | | | | | |
| 1. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | maintained my interest | |
| | (3) | (7) | (3) | (1) | | | |
| 2. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | helped me see a contemporary issue
more clearly | |
| | (1) | (1) | (6) | (6) | | | |
| 3. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | did not inspire me | |
| | (11) | (3) | | | | | |
| 4. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | really seemed to bring the character
to life | |
| | | | | (5) | (9) | | |
| 5. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | seemed too artificial--too much like
"play acting" | |
| | (9) | (4) | | (1) | | | |
| 6. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | used words and thought patterns in
present day usage | |
| | (4) | | (5) | (5) | | | |
| 7. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | lacked the directness of a conventional
sermon | |
| | (4) | (5) | (5) | | | | |
| 8. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | led me toward personal action or change | |
| | (2) | (1) | | (3) | (8) | | |
| 9. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | was not very well understood by me | |
| | (2) | (5) | (5) | (1) | | | |
| 10. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | helped me to hear a word of judgment I
needed to hear | |
| | (5) | (2) | (3) | (3) | (1) | | |
| 11. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | projected an attitude of love for mankind | |

Table 5 (continued)

12.	(1)	(4)	(5)	(4)		helped me to understand God's love for me
13.	(2)	(4)	(4)	(3)	(1)	helped me to understand God's love for all others
14.	(2)	(5)	(5)	(1)	(1)	spoke to some of my personal needs
15.	(8)	(2)	(4)			made me feel a oneness with the character
16.	(1)	(1)	(6)	(6)		did not have a sufficiently forceful conclusion
17.	(1)	(5)	(5)	(1)		did not initiate an encounter between God and myself
18.	(8)	(4)	(2)			contained points that were easy to remember
19.	(4)	(3)	(2)	(5)		made me eager to serve God more than I have served him up until now
20.	(6)	(6)	(2)			led me to accept the message

There were divergent opinions as to whether the sermon was well understood, but the prevailing opinion was that it was understood.

Another area of concern is that in response to the statement: "helped me to hear a word of judgment I needed to hear" there was quite a spread of opinion which tended to be between "agree" and "uncertain". Again, I think that those responding did not feel that the separation of church and state was something about which they needed to be concerned, or for which they had any particular responsibility. Since I had decided that Latimer would be speaking in his own setting and not have the benefit of several hundred years of experience since his death, the sermon was, perhaps, not precise enough in speaking about ways in which one's conscience may be compromised today by political considerations.

The statement "projected an attitude of love for mankind" also received a wide spread of opinion, the weight of which tended toward "uncertain". This may be a fairly accurate response to Latimer. He was aggressive and did not mind putting a person in his place when he had the power behind him to accomplish it. In fact, his attitude toward Romanists was quite hostile. On the other hand, he was concerned about people. In the sermon I referred to a number of his social concerns, but in the interest of time I did not elaborate upon them, because some of his interests would not be pertinent to today's setting. For

example, he was concerned about the Act of Enclosure which was driving the farmers from the land, but it would have involved considerable digression to explain his concern. Because there was little explanation of his concern, he may not have come across as a person who loved mankind.

The next statement, "helped me to understand God's love for me" also had a mixed response, centering on "uncertain". Latimer's life was one of hostility towards those with whom he disagreed. His telling of his story does not mitigate this, for even at those places where he experienced advancement, it is acknowledged to be a reward from an unpredictable monarch, not a result of God's favor. The sermon does not give sufficient evidence of the love of God. A similar response is given to the statement, "helped me to understand God's love for all others." My impression of Latimer is that he was not sufficiently motivated by love for others, and therefore, as his story unfolds, this becomes clear to the congregation. Latimer simply did not possess the kind of charity toward those who opposed him which we would like to see in a Christian example.

Only two persons felt that the sermon did not speak to their personal needs. Most felt a oneness with the character, and most disagreed with the statement, "did not have a sufficiently forceful conclusion."

Most respondents seemed either to agree that the sermon did not initiate an encounter between God and themselves, or they were uncertain. This is probably the result

of the political machinations about which Latimer speaks. His biographers leave the impression that the ups and downs of his career were more related to his involvement with the King than to his devotion to God. No doubt, pointing out the realities of the situation tended to make the hearers feel that God's involvement was not particularly evident in Latimer's life. In fact, even as he assesses his own situation in the sermon, he is more apt to talk about political considerations than about devotion to God.

Most respondents agreed that the sermon contained points which were easy to remember.

One half of the respondents agreed with the statement "made me eager to serve God more than I have served him up until now," and two more were uncertain. The fact that five persons disagreed with the statement, however, brings into question the motivational nature of the sermon. One would have to say that half of the respondents were not motivated by this sermon to serve God. It is possible that the question did not seem relevant to the theme of the sermon, and that Latimer's request that his hearers live by conscience was not equated by some of the respondents with "serving God." Even so, the fact that one-half of the respondents were not motivated by the sermon to serve God, is indicative of a problem.

Finally, it should be noted that almost all of the respondents felt led to accept the message.

The benefits and hazards of presenting this particular character in a first person sermon. Overall, the respondents seem to react rather favorably to the technical aspects of the sermon. The interest was sustained, the message was understood, and information was satisfactorily transmitted. Where the sermon was somewhat less successful was in the area of motivation. Some of the respondents were apparently not quite sure what kind of personal response they were being asked to make. Or, if they were aware of what they were being asked to do, they did not feel particularly motivated to do it. I believe that motivation would have been increased if I had caused Latimer to tell a little less of his story, given him more opportunity to reflect upon human nature in general, and caused him to make more frequent application of his own observations to the lives of his hearers.

Another area of concern is the spread of opinion about the message of love. Latimer was not quite as charitable as we would like a Christian leader to be. He was a child of his times who was fighting, sometimes for his life, to advance what he thought to be the right course for the church. I found it difficult to be honest with the facts of his life and still convey an attitude of love. I believe that a technique which would have improved the projection of love would have been for Latimer to comment more than he does on the error of his former attitude toward others. Had he spoken more from the mellowed attitudes of

old age, he might have been able to be more objective about his own faults, and thereby been able to convey to the hearers an awareness of the redeeming nature of love.

Chapter 5

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Introduction

The person chosen as the subject of a sermon to exemplify the application of the first person preaching technique to the twentieth century is the Baptist preacher and civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. An advantage of using King is that his name is certainly well known to a contemporary congregation. This means that some persons would be in attendance simply to hear an assessment made of his life and work. Children are learning about King increasingly in the public schools. In fact, children in school today probably have a better knowledge of, and appreciation for Martin Luther King, Jr., than do their parents, who were living through the era of King's activity. Acquaintance with the name, however, does not signify awareness of the man's life. When I indicated in conversation with one of the lay persons of my church that I anticipated speaking on Martin Luther King, Jr. his response was, "Oh, was he a Christian?" This response was not intended to be negative or critical, but was simply an expression of ignorance.

A disadvantage of speaking on King is that we may expect to find a degree of hostility toward him and the

civil rights movement, because that movement has been disruptive of the lives of a good many people, and its intentions commonly misunderstood. King has not been dead long enough to be elevated in the minds of most white people to the position of saint and hero, which might be accorded him among black people. Therefore, it certainly becomes a challenge to address a white, comfortable, middle class, suburban congregation in the name of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The reason for choosing this person. I chose to speak on Martin Luther King, Jr. because of my own personal high regard for him, and my feeling that his methods of dealing with racial problems are consistent with the Christian faith. I felt that if members of a white Christian congregation could come to appreciate him and what he was attempting to accomplish, that would be a substantial forward step in racial understanding. The day chosen for this presentation was Human Relations Sunday, the day when an offering is received in our congregation for the advancement of human understanding and ethnic empowerment. So many incidents have occurred in the area of race relations in the past two decades that the typical white suburbanite may be concerned about ultimate aspirations of black people. There is the recollection of riots, burning, and looting which tends to cast Negro demonstrations for basic human rights in a negative light. By reexamining some of the

major incidents in the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., and some of the important things which he said, it is my intention to distinguish the civil rights movement and the appeal for dignity and justice from the lawless acts of other individuals who were not a part of the civil rights movement. It is my hope then, that such a message will create understanding among the races, and motivate white people to join forces with black people and others in a common pursuit of dignity and justice for all.

The reason for including certain events. The material available on Martin Luther King is abundant. Not only are there many biographies available, there are collections of sermons and other writings by King himself. All of this makes it easy to assemble information on the man, his thought, and his activities. While each of his confrontations is interesting in its own right, a detailing of each event might give the impression of boring repetition. Therefore, I felt it necessary to be selective with regard to the confrontations and demonstrations which would be mentioned. I felt it necessary to spend considerable time discussing the Montgomery bus boycott, as this was the event which catapulted King to fame. It was also an event which helped him to plot his course for the future. I felt that people needed to know something about his childhood, youth and educational background, but that artistically, it would be better to insert that information almost

as an aside, rather than to begin the sermon with his birth. I felt it was better to establish who he was and then go back and discover how he happened to arrive there.

Because the Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington, D.C. provided a platform for an important speech, I felt that that should be included. The sit-in demonstrations of 1960 were a major demonstration of the nonviolent spirit and I felt that that should be included also. One of King's most significant statements was the "Letter from Birmingham Jail". In order to give him an opportunity to comment upon it, I felt that it was necessary to give some background on the situation that developed in Birmingham. Perhaps King's most memorable speech was his address to the participants in the March on Washington. It was important to give the background for this March, and then to share a generous portion of that speech. I had the feeling that by the time that speech was concluded in this sermon, the congregation would have had sufficient exposure to King to understand his motives, his thought and his actions. Therefore, it was a fitting place at which to conclude.

The reason for excluding certain events. I would have liked to include some reference to the fact that King received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. However, when I chose to conclude the sermon with his address to the participants in the March on Washington, I no longer had the option of including that event which came later. I would

have liked to include the symbolic act of nailing of demands on the door of the city hall in Chicago, but interesting as that event was, it did not have the impact of the speech in Washington. I believe that the inclusion of any more activities would have represented an over-kill. It was more important to give the flavor of his life and program than to give an extended list of events. As in any kind of preaching, the limitation of the time available for the sermon necessitates selectivity.

The effect of historical scholarship. It is still too soon after the death of King to expect much in the way of objective assessment. Most of the materials available to me dealt favorably with King and his program. Lerone Bennett, Jr. provides a very satisfactory biography of King up to 1964.¹ While his work is favorable to King, he does share some unfavorable information, such as King's two attempts at suicide as a youngster,² his early disaffection with the Negro religious tradition,³ and his determination to avoid the Negro's stereotype.⁴ He also helps to give insights into the development of King's philosophy as he was exposed to Hegel, Rauschenbusch, and

¹Lerone Bennett, Jr., What Manner of Man: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Chicago: Johnson, Inc., 1964.)

²Ibid., p. 19.

³Ibid., p. 25.

⁴Ibid., p. 34.

Gandhi.⁵ His suggestion of King's awareness of the "Zeitgeist" tends to support King's sense of destiny.⁶ King's own collection of sermons and writings entitled Strength to Love gives further insights into his intellectual development and helps to unfold his deep Christian convictions. Coretta Scott King's book, My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr., supplements Bennett's book, giving more insights into King's sense of mission and his warm home life. Her book also fills in the details from 1964 to King's death in 1968, which were lacking in Bennett's book. There does not seem to be any controversy as to the place or date of various events in King's life. What controversy there is would be related to King's motives. I choose to believe, on the basis of his own statements, his writings and his actions, that King was motivated by Christian love and a search for justice. That is the underlying presupposition as I seek to unfold his character in this sermon.

The resolution of certain difficulties. In sharing a biography I feel that it is more important to catch the imagination and interest of the congregation than it is to begin at the beginning of a person's life. In fact, people are more generally interested in the significant events of a person's life which make him/her noteworthy, than in the

⁵Ibid., pp. 36-39.

⁶Ibid., p. 60.

events of his/her early life, except as they have bearing on his/her later development. For this reason I chose to open the sermon with Rosa Park's experience on the Montgomery bus. It was this incident which brought King to the attention of the nation.

The time in which King is speaking in this sermon would be sometime after the March on Washington, as that is the last event I have him mention. He is victoriously leading his people. He knows what it is to live under the threat of death, but he does not allude to any foreknowledge of this. He concludes with the magnificent speech which is one of the high points of his career. Five years later he will be killed by an assassin's bullet. A congregation needs to experience the contrast between his words of reconciliation and the violent act which ended his life. But it is not possible to have him comment on his death. Therefore, I chose to have placed in the bulletin, immediately under the sermon title, this statement:

On April 4, 1968, while he was preparing to participate in a nonviolent demonstration in Memphis, Tennessee, the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was ended by an assassin's bullet.

Annotated Bibliography

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in Birmingham. Contains famous "Letter from
Birmingham Jail."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a Negro seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama started a revolution. She was seated somewhat forward on a crowded city bus. At a certain stop six white passengers got on and the bus driver got up and asked the Negro passengers to give up their seats, and move to the back of the bus. It was a common occurrence--it happened all the time all over the South. But that day Rosa refused to get up. The bus driver called the police, and Rosa was arrested. Later she said, "I don't really know why I wouldn't move. There was no plan at all. I was just tired from shopping. My feet hurt." She said the reason was that her feet hurt. I say that the Spirit of the Times--Destiny--had tracked her down. I continue to be amazed by what God can use to accomplish his purposes--a woman with tired feet. In that incident God also tracked me down--got me involved in an event which was to change me, the Negro, the white person and America profoundly.

My name is Martin Luther King, Jr. I was given the opportunity to participate in this twentieth-century American revolution. I would like to share with you some of the highlights of that event, not to give you a lesson in history, but to help you to understand the necessity of all God's children living together in love and mutual respect.

The first thing that I would like to tell you is

how things came to pass as they did in Montgomery. When word got out to the Negro community of Rosa Park's resistance and arrest, some of the leaders got together to discuss what could be done to end this and other sources of humiliation in our city. It was decided that we should call for a one-day boycott of the bus line by Negroes to symbolize our protest. We set the date for December 5, informed our people as best we could, but had no way of knowing whether our people would support the idea. That day the boycott was almost totally effective; Negroes walked, rode mules and drove wagons. It was obvious that our people were ready for a new shuffle of the cards--they simply needed a cause.

That afternoon Negro leaders met again and decided that we should extend the boycott until the bus company met certain minimal demands, such as equal courtesy for all bus patrons, seating on first come, first served basis, and the hiring of Negro drivers on those lines predominately patronized by Negroes. We voted to establish the Montgomery Improvement Association. I was elected president and given the responsibility of addressing a mass meeting that same evening. I had about an hour to prepare my speech. The problem, as I saw it, was how to be militant enough to keep my people aroused to positive action, and yet moderate enough to keep this fervor within controllable and Christian bounds. We met that night in a packed church, with some four thousand people standing outside listening

to loudspeakers. When the people voted to keep up the boycott until the demands were met, I addressed them:

Our method must be that of persuasion, not coercion . . . love must be our regulating ideal. We must hear the words of Jesus echoing across the centuries: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you". . . . In spite of the mistreatment that we have confronted we must not become bitter and end up hating our white brothers. . . . If you will protest courageously, and yet with dignity and Christian love, when the history books are written in future generations, the historians will have to pause and say, "There lived a great people--a black people--who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization."

Following that meeting we organized ourselves for the long and difficult ordeal of going without public transportation. The boycott lasted three hundred and eighty two days.

What was it that brought me to that point? What had contributed to making me a part of that moment? I had been born into a middle class Negro family in Atlanta, Georgia. My father was pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church and a recognized leader of the Negro community. He made no secret of his hope that I, who bore his name, would also become a preacher. I confess that I did admire the ability of Negro preachers to use words to create responses and control audiences. I even told my mother when I was six, "You wait and see, I'm going to get me some big words." But I had it in mind to study medicine. I was repelled by the Negro religious tradition with all of its hand-clapping and amening. I felt that it was intellectually unrespectable and irrelevant to Negro needs. I wanted none of it.

I had plenty of experiences as a young person which brought me close to hating white people: white parents who wouldn't let me play with their children; having to buy shoes in the back of the store; being forced to go to the back of the bus; having to eat behind a curtain in a dining car. The indignities and humiliating experiences were endless. I then determined that I would study law to help my people.

I skipped the ninth and twelfth grades and entered Morehouse College at the age of fifteen. In my junior year I ceased resisting the promptings of God's Spirit and decided to enter the ministry. In 1947 I was ordained and named as Assistant Pastor in my father's church.

I received my Bachelor's degree the following year, and enrolled in Crozer Theological Seminary. I became exposed there to the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch, the great spokesman for the social gospel, who called for the application of the social principles of Jesus to the problems of the modern world. The idea that the church should take a direct, active role in the struggle for social justice became pivotal in my thinking. While I was in seminary, I also became impressed with the tactics which Mahatma Gandhi had employed in India to free India from British rule--tactics like fasts, general strikes, boycotts, mass marches and civil disobedience--but all in the spirit of nonviolence. His way called for self-sacrifice. I was not sure it would work in America. I guess I just filed

the idea away.

In 1951 I graduated from seminary and went on to Boston University to pursue graduate studies in Philosophy. While I was there, I met and married Coretta Scott. Prior to receiving my Doctor of Philosophy degree I accepted the call to be pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. I didn't know it then, but the same Destiny that was tracking down Rosa Parks, was tracking me, getting me into a position to participate in the revolution.

Let me come back to that event. We held mass meetings around the city, rotating from church to church, in order to build up Negro morale. The meetings contained all of those things I had formerly despised and tried to get away from--testimonies, spirituals, hand-clapping, shouting and amening. But in all this I eventually began to see that the Negro religious tradition contained enormous reserves of psychic and social strength which had never been adequately tapped before. I began to accept myself and my people as history had made us, and my own transformation got under way.

I also began to discover what we were up against. At first I thought the negotiations would proceed rapidly. I learned, instead, that no one gives up his privileges without strong resistance. I was arrested for going thirty miles an hour in a twenty-five mile zone and thrown into a stench-filled, over-crowded jail.

Four days after my release, a bomb exploded on the front porch of my home, while my wife and baby were at home. By the time I arrived, there were a thousand armed Negroes milling around outside, muttering threats. The mayor and other civic officials were inside. I felt that it was important to defuse the potential for violence, so I stepped out on the porch and addressed the crowd:

Don't get panicky. He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword. I want you to love your enemies. Be good to them. Love them and let them love you. If I am stopped this movement will not stop . . . for what we are doing is right. . . . It is just and God is with us.

Hearing that, the crowd left. Gandhi had said a long time before:

The history of mankind is crowded with evidence proving that physical coercion is not adapted to moral regeneration; that evil can be exterminated from the earth only by goodness; . . . that there is great security in being gentle, harmless, long-suffering and abundant in mercy; that it is only the meek who shall inherit the earth, for the violent who resort to the sword are destined to perish with the sword.

I became more and more convinced of the rightness of our movement. Its spirit came from Jesus; the technique came from Gandhi. Even so, the tenacity of our opponents, the continuous danger, the demands made upon me and my family, wore me down until I was brought to my knees in my kitchen one evening, admitting to God that I had no powers left. "I've come to the point where I can't face it alone," I said. And into that kitchen came the presence of the Divine and an inner voice saying: "Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth, and God will be at your

side forever." That vision was the turning point in my life. And it came not from Gandhi, but from my Negro Baptist understanding of God. My uncertainty disappeared. Since then I have been ready for anything.

In November, 1956, the United States Supreme Court ruled that segregated buses were unconstitutional. On December 21, after 382 days of struggle and harassment, the buses of Montgomery were integrated.

The Montgomery movement convinced me of the necessity of confronting evil head-on, rather than cowering before it. In January, 1957, the Montgomery Improvement Association became the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. I was elected president. We called upon Negroes to assert their dignity by refusing to cooperate with evil. We felt that every individual has a right, a duty, to break or to ignore unjust laws, for anyone who accepts segregation involves himself tragically in his own degradation.

We felt that we needed a highly visible event that would prod the conscience of the nation on the issue of voting rights. We called for a prayer pilgrimage to Washington, D.C. in May, 1957. Thirty-five thousand persons responded. I was asked to address them from the steps of the Lincoln Monument. I took advantage of the opportunity to challenge the nation:

Give us the ballot and we will no longer plead--we will write the proper laws on the books. Give us the ballot and we will fill the legislature with men of goodwill. Give us the ballot and we will get the people judges who love mercy. Give us the ballot and we will quietly, lawfully, implement the 1954 decision

of the Supreme Court. . . . Give us the ballot and we will transform the salient misdeeds of the blood-thirsty mobs into the calculated good deeds of orderly citizens.

Then I spoke more pointedly to the gathered assemblage and said: "We must never be bitter. If we indulge in hate the new order will be the old order. We must meet hate with love, physical force with soul force." Following that prayer pilgrimage, the people headed back to their homes to do everything they could to register voters.

On February 1, 1960, the Spirit of the Times once again surfaced and led us toward our destiny. Some students in Greensboro, North Carolina, dissatisfied with the slow pace of desegregation, decided to occupy seats at a segregated lunch counter until they were served. Overnight the sit-in movement was born. By the end of March, sit-ins had occurred all over the South, except in Mississippi. Our Southern Christian Leadership Conference saw in this spontaneous movement something that the masses could do. We organized the movement so that it wouldn't die out. We trained young people in the spirit of nonviolence, teaching them that the goal must be reconciliation and the creation of the beloved community. I myself was arrested at a sit-in, sent to a state prison and placed in solitary confinement until John F. Kennedy brought pressure to bear, which made it possible for me to be released on bail. It was not the last time I would be in jail. In fact, many people were now going to jail. But such was the nature of our conflict

that, far from being a disgrace, going to jail became a badge of honor. All over the South Negroes found the courage and conviction to meet physical force with soul force. They chose neither to exercise violence nor to accept domination. Instead, they chose to disturb the tranquility of the nation until the existence of injustice is recognized as a virulent disease menacing the whole of society--a disease that must be cured.

Another major confrontation with segregation took place in Birmingham in the Spring of 1963. We felt that Birmingham was the most segregated city in the nation--the chief symbol of racial intolerance. If we could be successful there, we could break the back of segregation all over the country. We issued a manifesto calling for fair hiring practices, establishment of a bi-racial committee and the desegregation of facilities in downtown stores. On Good Friday fifty demonstrators and I were arrested by Safety Commissioner "Bull" Connors as we sought to walk peacefully to the City Hall to present our statement. I was held in solitary confinement and incommunicado for three days.

During my confinement I wrote a long letter answering certain criticisms which had been published by white Christian leaders. The document came to be called "Letter From Birmingham Jail." They said our campaign was poorly timed. I countered that Negroes were always being told to wait; that we had waited for three hundred forty years for

our constitutional and God-given rights. They said that our actions produced ill will. I countered that we had learned from painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor, that not a single gain had been made in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. They said we were impatient. I countered that:

When you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; . . . when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an air-tight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you . . . seek to explain to your six year old daughter (that) she can't go to the public amusement park . . . (because) Funtown is closed to colored children. . . ; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored" . . . then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.

After four days I was released on bail through the good offices of Attorney General Robert Kennedy. We resumed our demonstrations, which were essentially peaceful marches toward city hall. "Bull" Connors ordered us to go back, and when we did not obey, he dispersed us with fire hoses that could peel the bark off a tree, and with vicious police dogs which tore into peacefully assembled children. It was then that world opinion turned against the tactics being used against us. Shortly thereafter, a white committee was empowered to negotiate with us, and a phased program of desegregation was agreed upon.

The last thing I want to tell you about is our March on Washington, D.C., in August, 1963. In 1954 the

Supreme Court had ruled that public schools should be desegregated "with all deliberate speed." Negroes felt that it was proceeding "with all deliberate delay." Nine years after the decision only nine percent of Southern Negro students were attending integrated schools. At this pace it would be 2054 before integration of southern schools became a reality. The nation was preparing for the one hundredth anniversary of the signing of The Emancipation Proclamation, which was supposed to have given freedom to the American Negro. We felt that the country needed to be made aware that what had been promised to us was not forthcoming.

We appealed to people to come from across the country and gather before the Lincoln Memorial at the end of August, 1963. Two hundred fifty thousand persons gathered there as a symbolic reminder that America had defaulted on her obligation. I was to address the assemblage. As I looked out over the multitude of black and white faces I was overcome with emotion and departed from my prepared speech. I told them:

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, . . . will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

. . . With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

. . . From every mountainside let freedom ring.

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of that old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!"

Evaluation of the Sermon

Results of the Questionnaire. A compilation of the responses of fourteen persons to the sermon on Martin Luther King, Jr., follows on the next page. All respondents felt that their interest was maintained and that they had been helped to see a contemporary issue more clearly. Almost all respondents felt inspired by the sermon and all felt that the character had been brought into life. No one felt the sermon to be artificial and all agreed that the sermon employed words and thought patterns in present day usage. No one felt that the sermon lacked the directness of a conventional sermon.

Eight persons felt led toward personal action or change, but four were not sure, and one disagreed. Since the major intention of the sermon was to disseminate information and to promote understanding, it may have been difficult for some persons to sense what action was called for. Perhaps those who were uncertain were not convinced of the purity of King's motives, and therefore felt unwilling to endorse his cause.

No respondent reported that the sermon was not understood by him.

Ten persons felt helped in hearing a word of judgment which they needed to hear, but four did not. Those four may have felt that the love expressed by King softened the experience of judgment, or they may have felt

TABLE 6

A COMPILATION OF RESPONSES TO THE
SERMON REACTION QUESTIONNAIRE
FOR MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The following is a compilation of the reactions of fourteen persons to the sermon Martin Luther King, Jr. The number of persons choosing a particular response is given above the number of the response. The scale of response is as follows: 1 means strongly agree, 2 means agree, 3 means uncertain, 4 means disagree, 5 means strongly disagree.

- (12) (2)
1. 1 2 3 4 5 maintained my interest
- (10) (4)
2. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me see a contemporary issue
more clearly
- (1) (1) (3) (9)
3. 1 2 3 4 5 did not inspire me
- (9) (5)
4. 1 2 3 4 5 really seemed to bring the character
to life
- (3) (11)
5. 1 2 3 4 5 seemed too artificial--too much like
"play acting"
- (9) (5)
6. 1 2 3 4 5 used words and thought patterns in
present day usage
- (1) (1) (12)
7. 1 2 3 4 5 lacked the directness of a conventional
sermon
- (3) (5) (4) (1)
8. 1 2 3 4 5 led me toward personal action or change
- (2) (12)
9. 1 2 3 4 5 was not very well understood by me
- (6) (4) (2) (2)
10. 1 2 3 4 5 helped me to hear a word of judgment I
needed to hear
- (11) (3)
11. 1 2 3 4 5 projected an attitude of love for
mankind

that they were personally allied with the cause of King, and therefore, not under judgment.

It was certainly my intention that King's commitment to love should shine through. I was gratified, therefore, to discover that there was almost complete agreement that an attitude of love for mankind had been projected and that persons had been helped to understand God's love for themselves and others. I feel that the intention of the sermon was accurately perceived.

Eleven persons felt that the sermon spoke to some of their personal needs, but three persons did not agree. The latter may already have been sympathetic toward King and therefore, may have felt that they did not need the information, or they may have felt antipathy toward the cause of civil rights and were not persuaded by the sermon.

Most persons felt a oneness with the character, but two did not, perhaps not wishing to be related to King's cause. Most felt the sermon had a sufficiently forceful conclusion, though one felt strongly that it did not.

To the statement, "did not initiate an encounter between God and myself," most expressed their disagreement. However, there were four persons who were either uncertain or who agreed. Perhaps these persons are not sure that King's cause was a Christian one, or perhaps they do not feel that God can work through political action.

All persons agreed that the sermon contained points that were easy to remember.

Though three persons were not sure that the sermon made them any more eager to serve God than they had up until that time, the majority could agree with that statement. Considering the fact that the sermon dealt with a controversial person, it is really surprising that there were only three who did not agree, and that even they were only uncertain.

All respondents were led to accept the message. It is my hope that the message which they accepted is the necessity for us to live together as brothers and sisters.

The benefits and hazards of presenting this particular character in a first person sermon. An obvious benefit of presenting Martin Luther King, Jr., in a first person sermon is the opportunity to employ much of his fine oratory. Much of what he said was very simple, but he said it dramatically and poetically. His style is repetitive, but with the effect of mounting intensity. His imagery is often Biblical and always forceful. I found it a pleasurable experience to use his words and to see how they captivate a congregation, even when used by a white preacher before an essentially white congregation. His words communicate emotionally. They appeal to the soul.

I had anticipated a much greater degree of hostility or antipathy to the idea of preaching on King. Surprisingly, very little in the way of negative feeling was expressed. I believe that the congregation really

benefited from this exposure, and that the civil rights movement has become more understandable for many of them.

Of course, the hazards were there. There were persons who said that they could not understand why I wanted to speak on "that man." There was obvious resistance when the congregation was invited to stand and sing the freedom song, "We Shall Overcome." One person whom I approached with the questionnaire responded, "On Martin Luther King? No thanks." One person did not turn in the questionnaire. Another threw the questionnaire in a waste basket, but it was retrieved by someone else who was quite willing to fill it out. Nevertheless, it has been gratifying to have a number of persons say that they now felt far more positive toward King and his movement than they had prior to the sermon.

Preaching on a controversial person certainly causes the adrenalin to flow in the preacher. When one senses that what he is going to say may be rejected by some hearers simply because of the personality he is assuming, he begins to feel personally involved. Perhaps it is that involvement in the life of the character which gives this kind of preaching its vitality.

It just so happened that this sermon was presented on a Sunday following a week-long television presentation of Alex Haley's book, Roots. Numerous persons commented that the sermon on Martin Luther King, Jr., was a very fitting conclusion to what had been for them a very moving portrayal of the fight for civil rights and human dignity.

Chapter 6

AN EVALUATION OF TWO CONVENTIONAL SERMONS

Introduction

In order to assess the effectiveness of first person preaching it is necessary to have a standard for the sake of comparison. In order to develop a standard two conventional sermons were prepared and preached before the members of the same congregation in which the first person sermons were preached. A similar sermon reaction questionnaire was used (See Table 2), the difference being that this questionnaire omitted statements which related only to first person preaching. Questionnaires were distributed and collected in the same manner as for first person sermons.

Description of the Sermons

As it is not the purpose of this paper to analyze conventional preaching, or the method which one uses in the preparation of conventional sermons, neither the introductory materials nor the conventional sermons themselves are included in this section. The sermons may be found in the appendix. The principal purpose for the inclusion of the conventional sermons in this project is to provide a

standard of evaluation whereby the first person method can be judged. So that the reader may have some idea what it was to which the congregation was responding, the titles of the sermons and a brief sketch of each follows.

The first conventional sermon presented was a sermon on Christian stewardship entitled A Certain Widow. This was a three point sermon based on Mark 12:41-44. The points made were that all persons are recipients of many blessings in life, that all, therefore, have something to give, and that giving of oneself enriches the meaning of life. The sermon was based on the incident in the New Testament in which Jesus praised the generosity of a poor widow.

The second sermon presented was entitled Mark of a Christian: Hope. This sermon, based on Romans 5:1-5 addressed itself to the prevalence of suffering, the necessity of endurance, the development of character, and the suggestion that these elements contribute to hope. The intention of the sermon was to help persons to be hopeful in hard times.

The Results of the Questionnaires

Because the purpose of this section is to develop a standard for the sake of comparison, the two conventional sermons will not be treated individually. Rather, the responses found on the questionnaires for the two sermons have been taken together. Those combined responses are

found on Table 7 on the following page.

All the respondents indicated that their interest was maintained, and almost all said that the sermons helped them to see a contemporary issue more clearly.

The response to the statement "did not inspire me," was mixed. While twenty-one respondents did not agree, there were eight who did. Whether they were responding to the preacher, the style, or the subject of the sermon we do not know, but a little more than one-quarter of the respondents did not find the two sermons inspiring.

Most did not feel that the sermons were artificial, and most did feel that the sermons used words and thought patterns in present day usage.

In answer to the statement "led me toward personal action or change," there were nineteen who agreed, but ten who did not. The subject of stewardship may have met some resistance, and the subject of hope, while it may have lifted up assurance, may not necessarily have suggested that any particular action was called for.

Most persons indicated that the sermons were well understood by them.

To the statement "helped me hear a word of judgment that I needed to hear," twenty-one agreed, but nine did not. Almost all of those not agreeing were uncertain. This would indicate that the two sermons may have been a little too affirming and not challenging enough for some.

In response to the several statements on love, most

Table 7 (continued)

12.	(7)	(18)	(4)		(1)	spoke to some of my personal needs
	1	2	3	4	5	
13.	(1)	(1)	(3)	(10)	(13)	did not have a sufficiently forceful conclusion
	1	2	3	4	5	
14.	(1)	(2)	(12)	(7)	(7)	did not initiate an encounter between God and myself
	1	2	3	4	5	
15.	(17)	(12)				contained points that were easy to remember
	1	2	3	4	5	
16.	(5)	(14)	(7)	(3)		made me eager to serve God more than I have served him up until now
	1	2	3	4	5	
17.	(15)	(12)	(1)	(1)		led me to accept the message
	1	2	3	4	5	

or all respondents felt that the sermons projected an attitude of love for mankind and helped them to understand God's love for themselves and for others. Gratifying as such responses are, it may indicate that the sermons in question were weighted more heavily toward grace than judgment. If there is an imbalance in the preacher, it is probably healthier for the congregation if the imbalance is in that direction.

Twenty-five persons said that the sermons spoke to some of their personal needs, but five did not agree. Of those who did not agree, most were simply uncertain. Still, the proportion of those whose personal needs were met was rather high.

Most felt that the conclusions were sufficiently forceful, but there were some who did not agree.

The really disturbing statistic is that less than half of the respondents disagreed with the statement "did not initiate an encounter between God and myself." Twelve were not sure and three agreed with that statement, which means that the majority of the persons did not feel that the sermons provided an opportunity to come into contact with God. I do not know how that squares with the more affirmative responses about love, especially about God's love. Perhaps a large number of persons felt that God is encountered more authentically in judgment than in love.

All indicated that the sermons contained points that were easy to remember.

Nineteen persons indicated a greater eagerness to serve God, but ten did not. The sermons did not generate the level of motivation which one might desire.

Almost all respondents said they were led to accept the message.

While our real interest in this section has been to determine the responses of the congregation to conventional sermons in general, it was felt that some of the above comments were in order so that the reader might understand some of the dynamics involved in the congregational responses. The real value of these responses in helping to formulate a standard of comparison will come to light in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FIRST PERSON SERMONS RELATIVE TO CONVENTIONAL SERMONS

Introduction

It is the intention in this chapter to consider the cumulative responses to the four first person sermons, and to deal specifically with those areas where first person preaching falls below a certain level of favorable response. Percentages of favorable response to first person preaching are compared with percentages of favorable response to conventional preaching, and some conclusions are drawn from the study.

Cumulative Responses to the Four First Person Sermons

The cumulative responses taken from the sermon reaction questionnaires for the four first person sermons are found on the following page. This table (Table 8) was developed by combining the totals of responses made to the individual statements on all questionnaires for the four first person sermons.

Also to be found in this chapter is a table (Table 9) which compares percentages of favorable responses to first person sermons with favorable responses to conventional sermons. A "favorable" response is one in which

TABLE 8

CUMULATIVE RESPONSES TAKEN FROM THE
SERMON REACTION QUESTIONNAIRES FOR
THE FOUR FIRST PERSON SERMONS

The following represents the combined totals of responses made to the individual statements on all questionnaires for the four first person sermons. The number of persons choosing a particular response is given above the number of the response. The scale of response is as follows: 1 means strongly agree, 2 means agree, 3 means uncertain, 4 means disagree, 5 means strongly disagree.

	(35)	(18)	(2)							
1.	1	2	3	4	5					maintained my interest
	(23)	(21)	(7)	(3)						
2.	1	2	3	4	5					helped me see a contemporary issue more clearly
	(1)	(3)	(7)	(19)	(24)					
3.	1	2	3	4	5					did not inspire me
	(36)	(16)	(1)	(2)						
4.	1	2	3	4	5					really seemed to bring the character to life
	(2)	(2)	(1)	(13)	(36)					
5.	1	2	3	4	5					seemed too artificial--too much like "play acting"
	(29)	(23)	(2)	(1)						
6.	1	2	3	4	5					used words and thought patterns in present day usage
	(5)	(4)	(15)	(31)						
7.	1	2	3	4	5					lacked the directness of a conventional sermon
	(3)	(19)	(22)	(8)	(1)					
8.	1	2	3	4	5					led me toward personal action or change
	(2)	(4)	(1)	(13)	(35)					
9.	1	2	3	4	5					was not very well understood by me
	(16)	(21)	(11)	(3)	(2)					
10.	1	2	3	4	5					helped me to hear a word of judgment I needed to hear
	(33)	(12)	(6)	(3)	(1)					
11.	1	2	3	4	5					projected an attitude of love for mankind

Table 8 (continued)

12.	(20)	(21)	(9)	(4)		
	1	2	3	4	5	helped me to understand God's love for me
13.	(22)	(23)	(6)	(3)	(1)	
	1	2	3	4	5	helped me to understand God's love for all others
14.	(8)	(29)	(11)	(4)	(2)	
	1	2	3	4	5	spoke to some of my personal needs
15.	(18)	(24)	(8)	(4)		
	1	2	3	4	5	made me feel a oneness with the character
16.	(2)	(6)	(9)	(17)	(23)	
	1	2	3	4	5	did not have a sufficiently forceful conclusion
17.	(1)	(14)	(13)	(10)	(13)	
	1	2	3	4	5	did not initiate an encounter between God and myself
18.	(27)	(24)	(4)			
	1	2	3	4	5	contained points that were easy to remember
19.	(13)	(22)	(12)	(8)		
	1	2	3	4	5	made me eager to serve God more than I have served him up until now
20.	(31)	(19)	(4)			
	1	2	3	4	5	led me to accept the message

the respondent agreed or strongly agreed with a positive statement, or disagreed or strongly disagreed with a negative statement on the original questionnaires. For example, those who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "maintained my interest" are considered to have made a favorable response. Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "did not inspire me" are also considered to have made a favorable response. Those who chose "uncertain" are not considered in the favorable response category because they did not, at the moment of responding, have a strong enough positive response to the sermon to have acted one way or another. For comparative purposes, and in order to assist the reader so that he/she will not have to alter his/her thinking pattern constantly as to when a high percentage is a negative response and when a high percentage is an affirmative response, all of the negative statements on the questionnaires have been rewritten in the affirmative.

Rather than comment on the table of cumulative responses for the four first person sermons (Table 8) as was done with the responses to individual sermons in the preceding chapters, I choose instead to deal with the percentages of favorable responses to first person preaching as found on Table 9. All the percentages are available on that table for the reader's consideration, but in order to avoid the necessity of commenting on every response at this point, I am arbitrarily considering that a seventy percent

TABLE 9

PERCENTAGES OF FAVORABLE RESPONSES
TO FIRST PERSON SERMONS COMPARED
WITH FAVORABLE RESPONSES TO
CONVENTIONAL SERMONS

The following is a listing of the percentages of favorable responses to each statement on the first person sermon questionnaires and conventional sermon questionnaires respectively. For comparative purposes negative statements have been rewritten positively and the responses interpreted accordingly. Only the responses "strongly agree" and "agree" to positive statements and "strongly disagree" and "disagree" to negative statements on the original questionnaires are considered "favorable" responses. Figures shown are percentages of total "favorable" responses on each type of questionnaire.

	First Person	Conven- tional	
1.	97	100	maintained my interest
2.	82	93	helped me see a contemporary issue more clearly
3.	80	73	inspired me
4.	95	N/A	really seemed to bring the character to life
5.	91	93	seemed authentic--true-to-life
6.	95	94	used words and thought patterns in present day usage
7.	84	N/A	had the directness of a conventional sermon

Table 9 (continued)

	First Person	Conven- tional	
8.	42	65	led me toward personal action or change
9.	87	90	was well understood by me
10.	70	70	helped me to hear a word of judgment I needed to hear
11.	82	97	projected an attitude of love for mankind
12.	76	90	helped me to understand God's love for me
13.	82	90	helped me to understand God's love for all others
14.	69	83	spoke to some of my personal needs
15.	78	N/A	made me feel a oneness with the character
16.	71	83	had a sufficiently forceful conclusion
17.	46	49	initiated an encounter between God and myself
18.	93	100	contained points that were easy to remember
19.	64	65	made me eager to serve God more than I have served him up until now
20.	93	94	led me to accept the message

favorable response or better is an acceptable level of affirmation of that statement. Such a level of response means that seven out of ten respondents were responding favorably to content, preacher, and technique of delivery at the point being considered. I feel that a seventy percent favorable response is acceptable because the table of cumulative responses (Table 8) indicates that in all cases a varying percentage of the respondents chose "uncertain." Moreover, the varying needs of the individuals assembled in a congregation on any given Sunday assures some will not have their needs met, some will not feel that the content of the message spoke to them, and some will make a negative response to the preacher. For these reasons it occurs to me that twenty percent of the congregation might respond negatively to all or to aspects of a given sermon on a given Sunday, regardless of the technique involved, and that ten percent might be expected to feel uncertain. For these reasons I feel that a favorable response of seventy percent or above to any of the statements is an acceptable level of affirmation of the preaching technique and does not require comment when we are dealing with only the one style of preaching. Subsequently, when one style of preaching is being compared with another, I will comment on every percentage, regardless of level.

The first place on the table which falls below the seventy percent favorable response is the response to the statement "led me toward personal action or change." Here

the response was only forty-two percent favorable. It is quite evident that these first person sermons do not demonstrate the capacity to stimulate a high degree of motivation. Apparently, even though the character speaking may have been highly motivated in one direction or another, the hearers do not themselves feel personally stimulated.

The second statement to which there was less than seventy percent favorable response was the statement "spoke to some of my personal needs." Sixty-nine percent of the respondents agreed with this statement. Obviously, the experiences of the character speaking control the direction of that message. Some subjects may be just too remote in time or different in experience to speak to some of the needs of an acceptable number of persons.

The statement "did not initiate an encounter between God and myself" received only a forty-six percent favorable response. I assume that too many of the hearers considered themselves to be only spectators of the events which the subject of the sermon was narrating. Here again, it is in the area of motivation--moving a person into an encounter with God--that the first person sermon demonstrates weakness.

Finally, to the statement "made me eager to serve God more than I have served him up until now" only sixty-four percent responded favorably. Considering the higher levels of favorable response to other statements on the questionnaire, it is apparent that the first person sermon

is not without merit, but it has not demonstrated the capacity to motivate which I had anticipated.

A Comparison of Favorable Responses

In this section I intend to compare the percentages of favorable responses to the first person sermons with the percentages of favorable responses to the conventional sermons, as those percentages are found on Table 9.

All of the respondents to the conventional sermons indicated that their interest was maintained. The percentage of favorable response to the first person sermons was only slightly less. Again, the conventional sermons received a very high favorable response to the statement "helped me to see a contemporary issue more clearly." The first person sermons were considerably lower.

At only two points did the first person sermons have a higher favorable response than the conventional sermons. One of those was in response to the statement as to whether the respondent felt inspired. Even here the first person sermons received only eighty percent. The conventional sermons received seventy-three percent.

Ninety-five percent of those responding to the first person sermons felt that those sermons really did bring the character to life, but there was no comparison with conventional sermons as the statement did not apply to them.

Both kinds of sermons received rather high percentages of favorable response to the statement "had authenticity

and trueness to life," with first person sermons receiving ninety-one percent and conventional sermons ninety-three percent. Both styles of preaching also received high percentages of favorable response to the statement that "words and thought patterns conformed to present day usage." In fact, strangely enough, the first person sermons were one percent higher than the conventional sermons, with the former having ninety-five percent.

Eighty-four percent of those responding felt that first person sermons had the directness of the conventional sermons. That would mean that a high percentage of the hearers felt that the first person sermons had the same capacity for a direct approach which conventional sermons would have had. Of course, the questionnaires for the conventional sermons did not have this question.

To the statement "led me toward personal action or change" the conventional sermons came off with a considerably higher percentage of favorable response. Even so, the conventional sermons received only sixty-five percent favorable response. It will be recalled that this was one of the places where the first person sermons fell considerably below the arbitrary seventy percent level of acceptability. As to being well understood, the conventional sermons stood slightly higher with ninety percent than the first person sermons with eighty-seven percent.

Both styles of preaching stood at seventy percent favorable response to the statement "helped me hear a word

of judgment I needed to hear." This apparently is an area that needs to be improved in either style of preaching. With regard to projecting an attitude of love for mankind, the conventional sermons had a substantially higher percentage with ninety-seven percent favorable response, as opposed to eighty-two percent for first person sermons. Apparently, the preacher can make his/her point with far greater precision in conventional preaching than when he/she is dependent on the materials taken from an individual life.

Conventional sermons received a far higher percentage of favorable response to the statement "helped me to understand God's love for me." To that statement, and the one that followed, "helped me to understand God's love for all others," the conventional sermons received ninety percent each, whereas the first person sermons received seventy-six percent and eighty-two percent respectively.

With regard to speaking to the personal needs of individuals, the conventional sermons had a higher percentage with eighty-three percent, as opposed to sixty-nine percent for first person sermons. This appraisal might be attributed to the fact that a conventional sermon can be more need-oriented than a first person sermon, which must be controlled by the experiences of an individual and the data available on him/her.

The statement "made me feel a oneness with the character," appeared only on the first person questionnaires.

I had expected that the favorable response to this statement would be higher than the seventy-eight percent indicated. Differences in historical situations may have prevented the identification sought for.

Eighty-three percent of those responding to the conventional sermons indicated that the conclusions were sufficiently forceful. Only seventy-one percent gave a favorable response for the first person sermons. A possible explanation of the difference may be that in working on a conventional sermon the preacher is free to discover and use a forceful illustration from any time or place to conclude his/her message. In a first person sermon, since the entire sermon is a narrative, any concluding illustration from the life of the person may lack the benefit of contrast, for it would be one more incident among many which have been previously described.

The low point for both styles of preaching came in response to the statement "initiated an encounter between God and myself." First person sermons received forty-six percent favorable response, while conventional sermons received only forty-nine percent favorable response. There appears to be a critical weakness here for either style of sermon. In order for the individual to have an encounter with God, he/she needs to be lifted out of the role of spectator and placed into the role of participant. The level of lethargy that needs to be overcome in a given congregation has been underestimated by me. Perhaps these

responses indicate the need for a more emotional presentation of either style.

Both styles of sermons rated high with regard to containing points that were easy to remember. Conventional sermons received one hundred percent favorable response to this statement, whereas first person sermons received ninety-three percent.

Again in the area of motivation, the statement "made me eager to serve God more than I have served him up until now" received almost equal favorable response for both kinds of sermons. First person sermons had sixty-four percent favorable response and conventional sermons only sixty-five percent. While the first person style of preaching received a lower percentage of favorable response than I feel to be acceptable, this is not necessarily an indictment of first person preaching, as the conventional sermons did not fare much better.

The responses to the statement "led me to accept the message" were both high, and were almost the same, with a ninety-three percent favorable response to the first person sermons, and a ninety-four percent favorable response to the conventional sermons.

Conclusions

On the basis of the foregoing material, one has to conclude that at almost every point the conventional sermons received a more favorable response than the first

person sermons. Even where the favorable response to the first person sermons was well within the range of an acceptable percentage, conventional sermons generally rated higher. First person preaching seems weakest in the areas dealing with motivation, though it does need to be pointed out that conventional sermons have problems in these same areas, even if not to the same degree.

In most areas of response tested, first person sermons did receive an acceptable level of favorable response. This indicates that first person preaching is not necessarily an unsatisfactory vehicle of communication, only that in the areas tested it is less satisfactory than conventional preaching.

The results of the questionnaires were surprising to me. Members of the congregation are invariably enthusiastic and generous in expressions of appreciation when a first person sermon is presented. Because of the disparity between such verbal expressions and the responses on the questionnaires, I conclude that the members of the congregation generally appreciate the first person sermons, find them informative, perhaps refreshing, but perhaps most of all, entertaining. Stories, like the parables of Jesus, make for easy listening.

The questionnaires did not test for entertainment value, nor would I want them to. I was interested in determining the effectiveness of first person preaching relative to conventional preaching as a technique for

interesting, informing and motivating the members of a congregation. The results indicate that conventional preaching does these things better. First person preaching is a satisfactory technique for interesting and for informing, but not for motivating.

First person preaching may be used to provide relief from a single style of communication. It may heighten interest in the total pulpit ministry because it does provide another approach. It can certainly be the vehicle for presenting an inspiring life to the congregation. And it can help the congregation to appreciate some aspects of the history of the Christian faith to which they might not otherwise be exposed.

Perhaps it can be said that techniques of communication are to a preacher what weapons are to a general. There is a place for variety in the arsenal, even though some weapons are less potent than others. Circumstances dictate usage. Perhaps one can say that conventional preaching is still the principal method of pulpit communication, but that occasionally one may also use chancel drama, a sermon in song, dialogue, films, or first person preaching.

First person preaching may be used effectively for interesting and informing a congregation. It should not be used with regularity, and it should not be expected to motivate a congregation.

Chapter 8

SUMMARY

The intention of this project is to test the effectiveness of first person preaching relative to conventional preaching as a technique for interesting, informing, and motivating members of a Christian congregation. First person preaching is defined as that style of preaching wherein the speaker assumes the identity of another person and proceeds to communicate his/her message in an autobiographical manner.

The procedure involved writing and presenting four first person sermons before one congregation. The subjects to those four sermons were Jeremiah, to represent the Old Testament era; the Apostle Paul, to represent the New Testament era; Hugh Latimer, to represent the period of the Reformation; and Martin Luther King, Jr., to represent the contemporary era. In addition to the four first person sermons, two other conventional sermons were prepared and presented before the same congregation.

For purposes of evaluation two sermon reaction questionnaires were developed; one for first person preaching, and one for conventional preaching. The difference between the two questionnaires was that the first person questionnaire contained three additional questions pertaining

specifically to first person preaching. Appropriate questionnaires were distributed to fifteen persons each time a test sermon was presented. Responses to the first person sermons were tallied and commented upon individually and corporately. Responses to the conventional sermons were tallied and commented upon only corporately.

A table listing the percentage of favorable responses to each kind of preaching was prepared. For purposes of comparison, favorable responses were deemed to be those affirmative statements on the questionnaires with which respondents agreed or agreed strongly, and those negative statements on the questionnaires with which persons disagreed or disagreed strongly. For easier reading, those negative statements were then rewritten in a positive manner and the percentage of responses which were favorable were listed for first person preaching and conventional preaching respectively.

The introductory chapter deals with the proposal, examines work done by others, describes my own involvement in first person preaching and discusses the method and procedures followed in this paper. Four subsequent chapters each include one of the first person sermons together with introductory materials and an evaluation based on the results of the questionnaire for that sermon. A sixth chapter describes and evaluates the two conventional sermons. Those sermons are to be found in the appendix.

The seventh chapter compares the percentages of favorable responses mentioned above to each of the statements on the two kinds of questionnaires. At almost every point the conventional sermons received a more favorable response than the first person sermons. First person preaching is weakest in areas dealing with motivation. The results demonstrate that first person preaching may be used effectively for interesting and informing a congregation, but because it is less effective than conventional preaching, it should not be used with regularity, and it should not be used where a high level of motivation is desired.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Mark of a Christian: Hope

Not long ago there was a story in the papers about an elderly couple who had entered into a suicide pact and killed themselves. They lived in a neighborhood marked by violence; they were in constant fear; they didn't see how things could get any better; they had lost hope. About the same time there was the story of a lady who was traveling with her husband on a cruise ship. One evening, unknown to anyone else, she fell overboard. It was more than an hour before she was missed. When her disappearance was confirmed the captain turned the ship around, and several hours after she had fallen overboard, she was discovered alive, out in the middle of the ocean. When she was brought on board she was asked how she managed to stay alive. She said, "I never lost hope."

Hope. We are fond of saying, "Where there is life, there is hope." But these stories, and others like them, would make it seem more appropriate to say "Where there is hope, there is life." The problem for all of us is how to find that hope which will sustain us--especially when the lamp flickers and we are afraid of the dark.

In the passage which was read this morning, Paul gives a formula for how one arrives at hope. He says,

"Let us rejoice in suffering for we know that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope." Let us consider that formula this morning and see if it will help us.

He says that hope begins in suffering, or trouble. I think that by nature we have a rather different impression. If we are hopeful, it is because we are surrounded by hopeful circumstances. When everything looks good we are hopeful; when things look bad, we lose heart. Hope has little power in itself--it is like a thermometer that goes up and down depending on the situation.

The problem for us is that the ground is always shifting. Probably no one ever found it easier to have hope than Americans of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. New discoveries, new inventions, new opportunities, a rising standard of living all worked together to produce a mood of expectancy about the future. Nobody doubted that the present was better than the past, and that the future would be better than the present. An optimistic philosophy of history looked toward inevitable progress, so that all the world was thought to be moving toward justice, decency and peace. An optimistic psychology taught people to feel that "everyday in every way they were getting better and better." An optimistic theology saw God as a kindly deity who would always make everything come out all right. But now we are faced with a different set of circumstances. A world war, a depression,

a second world war, a Korean war, a Vietnamese war, an accelerating arms race, proliferation of nuclear weapons, pollution, shortages of food and fuel, inflation, increased dependence on drugs all make an easygoing optimism impossible.

For such a generation, Paul has a word--he says that trouble produces endurance, which eventually produces hope. That way of reaching hopefulness is very different from the easygoing optimism which relies on happy circumstances. Paul knew about trouble. In another place he tells us "Five times I received thirty-nine lashes, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times shipwrecked"--and that is only a partial list of his troubles. But none of this caused Paul to lose hope.

Paul had discovered that trouble, trials, suffering, struggle and pain are essential to life and growth. The Bible reminds us that the eagle throws the young eaglets out of the nest so they will learn to fly--a terrifying lesson. A child leaves the security of home and goes off to school--and that is sometimes a painful experience. A little boy returned home from his first day in kindergarten. When his mother asked him how he liked school, he answered, "I quit!" She said, "What do you mean? One day in school and you quit?" He said, "I can't read, I can't write, and the teacher won't let me talk. What's the use?" Learning can be a struggle.

Personal growth is also a struggle. A number of us

have been engaged for more than a year now in the endeavor to learn more about the Bible and our own faith in preparation for teaching here in the church. The exercise is sometimes painful--we are reexamining cherished beliefs--we are sometimes challenged right at the place we have been most certain.

It is the midst of trouble, Paul says, that endurance is produced. Some translate the word "endurance" as patience--and that is in the meaning--but patience sounds rather passive. Endurance is stronger; "fortitude" would give even more of the active flavor of the word. When Beethoven was threatened with deafness, that most terrible of troubles for a musician, he said "I'll take life by the throat and go on." When Henley, the British poet, was lying in a Scottish hospital with one leg amputated, and the prospect that the other must follow, he wrote Invictus in which he says:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods there be
For my unconquerable soul.

That is the endurance Paul is speaking about--endurance that produces hope.

Paul then moves on to state that this endurance produces character. The word he uses for character is used of a metal that has been passed through the fire so that everything that is base has been purged out of it. It is used of precious metal as we use the word "sterling." It

describes something out of which every baseness of alloy has been eliminated. When affliction is met with endurance or fortitude, a person emerges who is stronger, purer, better, nearer God.

But that kind of character doesn't develop automatically. It is developed by determined patience with our limitations. We stop spending our time asking "Why did this have to happen to me?", and we start asking, "How am I going to make the best out of these circumstances?" It is the attitude of that prayer of serenity: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." It is the attitude of a young woman I saw interviewed on television this past week--she was completely deaf, but she could read lips, she could speak, and she was a marvelous gymnast and stunt woman. She had a limitation, but she was in control.

When Paul speaks of endurance producing character I think he also means "patience for the long haul." Not everything we seek is going to happen in our lifetime. In the book of Hebrews, after listing many of the heroes of the faith, people like Abraham and Moses and Gideon, the author says,

. . . and these men of faith, though they trusted God and won his approval, none of them received all that God had promised them; for God wanted them to wait and share the even better rewards that were prepared for us.

We are all tied together with each other and with those yet

to be, so that we must learn to take our consolation from the fact that we have forwarded the race a little, whether we have gotten all we expected or not.

Again, when Paul speaks of endurance producing character I think he is referring to self-discipline. There is a vision of excellence that spurs us on in many areas of life. There are young men in this congregation who get up early every morning, summer and winter, and report for swimming drill because of that vision of excellence. There are musicians who have so dedicated themselves to music that they will spend most of their waking hours polishing their talent. There are actors and dancers and writers who practice their art with precision and grace only because they have learned to endure when their bodies want to stop.

And in developing character the same vision applies --the vision that we can be more than we are by enduring temptation. A number of years ago a man by the name of F. W. Robertson was trying to think through some tempting options which faced him. He retreated to the mountains in his search for strength. Later he gave this testimony:

I know but one way in which a man may come forth from his agony scathless; it is by holding fast to those things which are certain--the simple, grand, landmarks of morality. In the darkest hour through which a soul can pass, whatever else is doubtful, this, at least is certain . . . it is better to be generous than selfish, better to be chaste than licentious, better to be true than false, better to be brave than to be a coward. Happy is the man, who in darkness of soul, has dared to hold fast to these venerable landmarks.

Endurance produces character.

The third thing Paul says is that character produces hope. A person of character is one who pays his way; he isn't asking for a free ride. He sees that there are problems in life, and rather than retreat to comfort and non-involvement he seeks to become part of the solution. The person who is fleeing from responsibility is fleeing from the very things that give life meaning, for problems create projects and projects give purpose to our lives. Retirement is a case in point. There are probably as many persons killed by retirement as there are persons killed by hard work. I'm not suggesting that retirement is bad if it means a slowdown, but if it means cessation--no more problems, no more responsibilities, no more projects, no more challenges--then something happens to the person's interest in life. He concentrates on himself, his aging process, his increasing aches and pains, until he is quite hopeless about life. A while back there was a play about a man who died and woke up in the after life. It was beautiful beyond his highest expectations. Everything was given to him before he could ask. Every potential desire was fulfilled before he could even know that he wanted it. He had to work for nothing; everything was beautifully presented to him. Finally, in the intolerable boredom of it all, he said to his attendant, "Now wait a minute, I want something now that I am going to have to work for, and wait for." The attendant said, "But that is impossible here."

The man, in anger, said "All right, then I'll go to hell." And the attendant said, "Sir, where do you think you are?" Life without challenge is hell. The person of character is willing to accept challenges and face problems, and that gives him meaning and hope.

Not only does the person of character discover hope in his response to challenges, he also finds hope by being open to the future. He has a vision that things can be better than they are, and he enlists to bring them about. He is betting on a better world, so he is looking to the future, not the past. Perhaps the saddest thing that can happen to a person is to come to the point where there is nothing to look forward to--everything of interest has already taken place, and there is no longer any expectancy about the future. I think that God made us to face forward, and not backward, and that we function best physically and mentally when we are moving toward the future. Our destiny is always out ahead of us, coming to meet us from the future, not from the past. I think that God has made all of us to be pilgrims--always bound for the promised land--but never fully arrived. If we settle down and become too content with where we are and too content with things as they are, we lose the vision of things as they ought to be, and with that loss goes hopefulness.

The final thing we need to deal with this morning is the fulfillment of that hope about which Paul speaks. So far it sounds like a bootstrap operation. We encounter

trouble, we endure, we develop character which makes us hopeful so that we can endure when we encounter more trouble. It sounds like a closed system that goes around in a circle. But that is not quite so. Paul began his discourse by saying that our hope is that we will share the glory of God. That means that there is a future dimension that is related to God.

Then Paul concludes this passage by saying that our hope will not be disappointed, because it is founded on the love of God which has been given to us through God's Spirit. So what Paul has been talking about is not a closed circle. Our hope begins and ends in God. He has given us the capacity to hope, and that capacity will not be disappointed. We have the capacity for thirst and there is something to satisfy it. We have the capacity for hunger, and there is something to satisfy that. We have the capacity for hope, and God, who has given us that capacity, will not disappoint us.

Hope, then, is not an unanswered longing--something to which we hold in spite of the obstacles. It is a trust that this is God's world, and that as we move out daily into our future we will encounter God and ultimately share his glory. He is the Alpha and the Omega--the beginning and the ending. It is from him that we come and to him that we are returning.

Trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope--and hope finds its

fulfillment in God. Isaac Watts said it more memorably
than I 250 years ago--and with his words I close:

O God our help in ages past.
Our hope for years to come,
Be thou our guide while life shall last,
And our eternal home.

APPENDIX B

A Certain Widow

What scenes come to your mind as you try to picture Jesus? Do you think of him as a boy in the temple? Taking children on his knee? Driving out money changers? Hanging on a cross? All these are familiar and have often been reproduced in art. There is one instance from his life that I have never seen in a painting. Mark describes it in our scripture for this morning: "And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury." The room where he sat was probably in a porch of the Court of the Women. Thirteen trumpet shaped receptacles were placed there so that people could make voluntary offerings to a number of worthwhile projects. As Jesus watched, a number of wealthy persons came by and made sizable contributions. Then came a poor widow. Name and background unknown. She put in two of the smallest Jewish coins in circulation. Yet with that small gift she stepped from obscurity into the light of history. She became a symbol immortalized by Jesus and by countless sermons ever since. This is the woman Jesus praised. Mark says Jesus called the disciples to him almost as though there were a sense of excitement about this act which he wanted his disciples to appreciate. He said, "this poor widow has put in more than

all those who are contributing to the treasury." Such an evaluation as that should lead us to examine the incident to see what lessons may be learned by us.

The first thing this incident does is to remind us that the fullest life involves giving. I am sure we know from experience that people feel most deeply involved in those things to which they are making some contribution. A man in a well paying position told me he had trouble making himself go to work in the morning. He sometimes slept late, sometimes just puttered. And at one time he enjoyed his work. But in this particular situation the man's work load had shifted so that he wasn't sure he was contributing anything to the job--and his work became a burden instead of a challenge.

It can be the same at home. A good many of our domestic problems arise, not from overwork, but from wondering whether we really matter to the family. One loses interest in a home if he gets the feeling that his presence is unnecessary. He senses that his contribution must not be very great and so he looks for something else in which to invest his time.

And it is that way in the church. The person who is a member but who does not contribute much of himself is probably not very concerned for the mission and work of the church. Those who are contributing most in energy, time, money and emotions are the ones likely to derive the greatest benefit because they have found a place where they

are needed and where their particular contribution is appreciated. But we have to keep that feeling of being needed alive--It is for that reason that I speak on stewardship just a few weeks after our financial campaign. I heard of a church a while back which received what could have been a problem gift. A man died and left the church \$100,000.00. We think that's wonderful, but it could have been a liability. Such a generous gift could have given people the feeling that their small contributions were no longer important. And by reducing the significance of their contribution, their interest and involvement would also be lost. But this man did a wise thing--he left the money with the stipulation that it be matched by the members of the congregation. The ability to make any contribution was made more significant and strengthened their involvement. It strengthens our involvement too, and leads to fullness of life.

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." That means one can find greater happiness in the ability to give than to get. In fact, it can be downright distressing to a person of integrity always to receive and never have opportunity to give. Ladies from a church I used to serve used to hold a tea party for the aged at a convalescent hospital each month. Everyone who participated rejoiced in the opportunity to be of some service. But those who were served also needed the opportunity to give. One of the old gentlemen being served began placing \$5.00 bills

under his napkin each time. The first tendency was to refuse it and say "Oh, no, we want to do this for you." But it was recognized by the ladies that he needed an outlet too--so his contributions found their way to a good project.

The capacity to give freely, however, requires that we recognize how generously we have received. Too often a successful person feels that he has made it all by himself. And we ought not to demean personal initiative--heaven knows there is little enough of it. But neither should we think that we have made it all by ourselves. For example, John Astor came to New York City in 1783, the son of a butcher. He invested his small capital in furs and developed a profitable trade with the Indians. He bought a farm in Manhattan for \$25,000.00, the value of which pyramided to \$500,000,000. With all respect to John Jacob Astor's genius, was it that alone which gave his investment such future value? No, it was the growth of the community as a whole. He was not responsible for the increase in value. This is the point which the writer of Deuteronomy wished to drive home. In the sixth chapter he wrote to the children of Israel:

When the Lord you God brings you into the land which he swore to your fathers . . . with great and goodly cities, which you did not build, and houses full of all good things, which you did not fill and cisterns hewn out, which you did not hew, and vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant . . . then take heed lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

When we give careful thought to our possessions, do we not have to admit that much has come to us through factors over which we had no control? The stability of our government; the growth of our community and nation; God's endowment of the land; the maintenance of law and order; our own strength and good health? G. B. Shaw defined a gentleman as "one who puts back into life more than he takes out." One could go a step further and say that a gentleman is one who feels he never can put back into life all that he has taken out. The basic question for us must not be "How much money can I make?" but "How much can I make of my money?" It is important to a full life to be able to give.

Not only does this poor widow remind us that the fullest life involves giving, she shows that real giving is sacrificial. We are accustomed to starting at the wrong end with our giving. We're afraid it's going to hurt, so we protect ourselves. For example, a great appeal may be made for clothing, so we go through our closets getting out all the things we no longer want. Now that's important--it's certainly better than not looking at all. But it is not the last word in Christian giving. Or we may be going to the store, and while we are backing out of the driveway we call to the neighbor: "Is there anything I can get for you?" That is thoughtful. It's neighborly. But is not the sacrificial donation of our energy that would be involved, for example, in going shopping for a sick neighbor when we had intended to stay home and rest. Or consider

how we encourage supporting the work of the church. We fix our eyes on an amount to be raised annually and we look for the most painless way of extracting it from the possible givers. We cite the percentages of exemption allowed by the government and stress the thought: "Why not give it to a good cause, since taxes will take it anyway?" Now, I'm not saying these are not necessary considerations in our complicated economy, but they are hardly the motivations for sacrificial giving, such as Jesus praised in this poor widow.

The value of a gift cannot be measured by its market price, but by its cost to the giver. David, the King of Israel, understood that. There was a terrible plague abroad in the land and David received the message through one of the prophets that he should build an altar and make a sacrifice at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Araunah was honored that his place should be chosen, and he offered the king the site, the wood for the fire, the building material for the altar and the animals for the sacrifice. David thanked Araunah, but turned the offer down saying, "No, but I will buy it of you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing." Real giving involves personal sacrifice.

When we sacrifice to make a gift it takes on value for the one to whom we give. A lady from South America was speaking with me a while back about American foreign aid. She said,

The trouble with the way you Americans give is that you demean the recipient. You say, "Here, take this. We don't want it." You mean to set us at ease about receiving it, but how do you suppose it feels to accept what someone else doesn't want? What you should say is, "This is valuable to me. I want it, but I want you to have it more."

Jesus saw the wealthy giving generous gifts from their abundance. He did not disparage their gifts, but neither did he call his disciples to take notice of them. This poor widow was out on the frontier of sacrifice where few of us ever get. Jesus said she gave more than all the rest.

The third thing we learn from this incident is that everyone has something to give. From our limited point of view we are impressed by costly gifts. Our eyes are fixed on the amount rather than on the relative cost. Thank God there are those who can make large gifts to worthy projects, and who actually do so. But Jesus' pattern for generosity is a woman who gave the equivalent of a penny. And there is wisdom here. Had Jesus chosen a wealthy person who made a generous gift and told us "Go and do likewise," we would probably say, "Of course we will Jesus--just as soon as we are equally well off."

Jesus' choice of a poor widow helps us to realize that everyone of us has something to give right now. Money is certainly one kind of gift. It is sufficiently flexible so that it can be turned into food, clothing, shelter, education, or medicine depending upon the need. And it can travel with minimum expense or difficulty to every part of the world. What a fantastic opportunity is ours when we

give. Money can mean food through UMCOR. Money can contribute to the mission of the church in 34 countries, including our own.

But money is not the only kind of gift. There is the gift of time. As in working with retarded children, or managing a hotline, or working with a youth group. There is the gift of service. I know a young man who has brought music into the lives of aged patients at a hospital. I know of a young woman who has given her skill as a beautician by washing and setting hair at the same hospital. There is also the gift of listening. The whole world is filled with lonely or anxious people who need nothing so much as another person who will give his undivided attention and just listen. The widow's gift speaks clearly that no life can be excused from grace and duty of sharing. We all have something to give.

In her book We Grew Up in America Alice Hazeltine tells about a custom of her mother's. Her mother kept a charity box on their dining table, the contents of which went to others. Nothing pleased the mother more than to be able to put something in that box. Sometimes the family protested that they did not have enough to be putting anything in a box for others. But never was the family so poor that they needed the contents of that box for themselves. On especially dark days, when they lacked, literally, a penny of their own, the mother would gather up the coins that had been put into the box and take them--always on foot

to save carfare--to a family less favored than her own had been. Miss Hazeltine says simply: "The light always shined more brightly when she returned, no matter how dark the day." Life is always fuller when we learn to give.

1

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